THE FATE OF HENRY OF NAVARRE

The Fate of Henry of Navarre

HISTORICAL ROMANCES

BY

THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE SWORD OF GIDEON.
THE LAND OF BONDAGE.
THE HISPANIOLA PLATE.
THE DAY OF ADVERSITY.
DENOUNCED.
THE CLASH OF ARMS.
A GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER.
ACROSS THE SALT SEAS.
SERVANTS OF SIN.
FORTUNE'S MY FOE.
THE SCOURGE OF GOD.
THE YEAR ONE.
THE FATE OF VALSEC.
TRAITOR AND TRUE.
KNIGHTHOOD'S FLOWER.
A WOMAN FROM THE SEA.
THE LAST OF HER RACE.
WITHIN FOUR WALLS (dealing with La Comans and her Denunciations).
THE KING'S MIGNON.
A FAIR MARTYR.

HENRY IV.

From the original Picture by Porbus
in the Collection of the Musée Royal, Paris.

THE FATE OF HENRY OF NAVARRE

A TRUE ACCOUNT OF HOW HE WAS SLAIN
WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THE PARIS OF THE TIME
AND SOME OF THE LEADING PERSONAGES

BY
JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

"Tout estoit permis en ce tempe, hors de bien dire et de bien faire"
—L'ESTOILE

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THE
FATE OF HENRY OF NAVARRE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

THE true history of the murder of Henri Quatre has never been told in the literature of this country, and only hinted at, though broadly so, in France. Moreover, outside the shelves of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, and those of the Libraries of Orléans and Tours, there is scarcely any account to be found of the extraordinary fact that, at the moment of the King's assassination, there were two attempts in preparation, and that, while the actual deed was being perpetrated by Ravaillac, other assassins were in waiting to commit it and, as I hope to show beyond dispute, were doing so in the immediate neighbourhood of where it occurred, and in the same street.

That the female sex played a strong part in the attempts on the most popular King that had ever before, or has ever since, sat upon the throne of France, is certain; and he who, perhaps, had been the lover of

more women than any other monarch, was supposed—though only supposed—to have fallen at last by their machinations, or, rather, by the machinations of one of them.

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorn'd;"

and when, to such fury, has to be added the fact that Henri had, with a jest accompanied by laughter, embraced the Romish Church as a necessity for obtaining the crown, and that, in that Church, no one believed in the sincerity of his apostacy, it may easily be understood in what danger his life always stood. Discarded mistresses are, probably, the most striking exponents of Congreve's lines, and there were many of these ladies in Paris who were bitterly disposed towards the King at the time of the murder. Among them there was, however, one whose heart was, perhaps, more deeply ulcerated by Henri's conduct than that of any other woman. This person was Henriette d'Entragues, who had been created Marquise de Verneuil at the time she was favourite, and who had borne to Henri a son who became, first, Bishop of Metz shortly after he was christened, and, afterwards, Duc de Verneuil; and a daughter who became the wife of the second Duc d'Épernon. She, too, like Gabrielle d'Estrées, of whom we shall hear, had had her foot on the steps of the

throne; but, unlike Gabrielle, it was not sudden death —a strongly suspicious death!—that deprived her of the great chance, but the necessity for Henri to find a wife who could bring a large dowry with her. This compulsion might, in the case of some women, have been accepted as a pardonable excuse for their lover's defection, but with her—haughty, of good family, and deeming herself the equal of any woman in Europe who was not a king's daughter—it was not so. Instead, her blood turned to gall, since she considered that Henri should have been content to remain an impoverished King rather than fail to accord her the same rights that he had once been about to confer on her predecessor. Consequently, from the time that Marie de Médici arrived in France the Marquise was well acquainted with, if she did not take an active part in, some of the later plots laid against the King's life.

They were, indeed, numerous; the generally accepted number of the attempts being eighteen, exclusive of the one which succeeded. They emanated from all classes; from the aristocratic leaders of "The League," which was still alive though weak, to such base-born and foul assassins—when they were not fanatics—as Jean Châtel, who was a draper's shopman; the Dutchman, Arger; and the Italian, Ridicovi—both Dominicans or Jacobins; the Vicar of St. Nicolas-des-Champs;

Jean Delisle, who was undoubtedly a lunatic, and many others, until, finally, Ravaillac, a provincial of humble origin, accomplished the deed while unconcerned with any plot whatever.

But what was, probably, the strangest thing in these attempts at murder is the fact that the whole of Paris, if not of France, knew that they were in the air, and no one knew it better than the intended victim himself though he was often unaware from what direction the blow would be struck. Moreover, his life had been too frequently risked in battle day by day—at the period when he was endeavouring to secure the throne that was his by right after the assassination of Henri III., and to which he had been named as the rightful heir of that king, if he died childless, by Charles IX. and his brother —for him to pay much heed to such attempts. He talked about these plots openly ; he regretted that they should be conceived against him ; he frequently stated that he would surely die at the hands of an assassin, but, except at the last, when he sought the shelter of Sully's official residence—the Arsenal—he took but few precautions against them.

As for the certainty that Henri would eventually be assassinated, it permeated the whole of the capital, and the prognostications on the subject were unceasing. A species of soothsayer, once a tutor of Sully, called

La Brosse gave, it is said—not by the gift of prophecy, but partly from knowledge of the intended plots which Ravaillac was to anticipate picked up in the lowest haunts of the capital, and partly by chance—the actual day, namely, the fatal 14th of May, on which the King was to die. Earlier, in 1607, several almanacks sold at the great fair at Frankfort predicted that Henri would perish in his fifty-eighth year, namely 1610, and that he would do so at the hands of his *own friends and courtiers*. Specimens of these almanacks are still in existence. In 1609, the year preceding the actual year of death, a Spanish Professor of Theology named Oliva, or Olive, in a book dedicated to the King of Spain, affirmed that Henri would die within twelve months; and a religious enthusiast, a supposed *devineresse*, termed La Mère Dasithée, on being consulted by the upstart Italian adventurer, Concino Concini (whose future wife, Leonora Galigaï, ruled the Queen), stated in the early months of 1610 that, if Her Majesty desired so much to be crowned—which ceremony had been long delayed—as was reported, it would be best for her to lose no time. The Duc de Vendôme, Henri's son by Gabrielle d'Estrées, hearing of the prediction of La Brosse, instantly informed the King of it—but the latter made light, or affected to make light, of the prophecy. Six hours later he was dead.

In absolute fact, everyone knew, or rather felt, that the King's end was near, though all imagined that it would proceed from a well-organized plot, and not from the determination of a single individual. A soldier, who had been brought up as a priest, meeting the widow of his late captain at Charenton, told her to go no farther into the city. "There is," he said, "a band of about a dozen men* employed by Spain to kill the King, and when that is done there will be terrible scenes in Paris and as great a danger to the Huguenots as there was on a certain St. Bartholomew's Eve." Henri himself was, before he parted from his wife on the afternoon of the tragedy, very restless and, calling to one of the guards in the passage, asked him what the hour was, to which the man replied, "Nearly four," while adding with the familiarity that the King encouraged between himself and his soldiers: "You had best take the air. It will refresh you." "You are right, *mon ami*," Henri replied; "order my coach for four o'clock."

To apply these various forebodings of disaster to an occult power of divination possessed by those who promulgated them, would be, in these days, to expose one's self to well-merited ridicule; but at least they testify to an indisputable fact. They show as clearly

* Later it will be seen that the band consisted of ten men.

as anything can show that a general knowledge existed that the days of Henri were numbered and that there were numerous persons in Paris who were well acquainted with the attempts likely to be made. It was, in truth, a knowledge that could not be concealed. The Roman Catholics principally hated Henri because they had no belief in the sincerity of his conversion, since, once before, during the massacre of St. Bartholomew, he had embraced the Catholic Faith to save his life and had then renounced it after returning to Navarre. The nobles who were members of The League hated him because he had effectually broken its power, and, indeed, it is possible that there were even Huguenots who hated him for having deserted his original faith. Meanwhile, since hired assassins are usually drawn from the most humble or the most desperate classes, there were scores of men sheltering in the lowest purlieus of Paris and in provincial towns who, dissatisfied with not having been called on yet to perform their hideous office, would be likely to chatter about what was eventually to happen; or, proud of the interviews they had had with the great ones of the land, would nod their heads significantly and mutter that they "could an' they would," and, thereby, arouse suspicions in the minds of those with whom they mixed.

That such creatures as these hired assassins were in existence is undoubted, as it is equally so that they must have had many interviews with the most eminent persons opposed to Henri.

The whole Court of France was at this time continually seething with plots against some person or persons. At one time Concino Concini was plotting against the nobility; at another the nobility were plotting to destroy him and his intriguing wife—the destruction, and that an awful one, finally falling in the next reign. The Duc d'Épernon, a man of the highest rank, yet one more fitted to be a swashbuckler than aught else and the person who was in actual fact in command of the whole of the infantry and, practically, the whole of the troops, was a traitor to Henri from the first. In his case, however, he not only conspired against the King but also against all who opposed him, thwarted him, interfered with his plans, admired his mistresses, or obtained the governments of provinces which he desired to add to the enormous number of those he already possessed, as well as against those who did not feel called upon to regard him as their superior—in some cases not even as their equal—or to treat him with any deference whatever. That D'Épernon was likely to be left out of an attempt upon the King's life, or that he would have permitted himself

to be omitted from such tremendous treachery, would have been to falsify all the tenets of his existence : his occupation, other than the aggrandisement of himself and his family, would have been gone. As will be seen in the subsequent account of his career, and later on, he was not excluded from the work in hand, and, indeed, he played one of the greatest, if not the absolutely greatest, part in the terrible drama which was projected and which only failed because it was anticipated by a few moments.

Amidst those characters to be described is one whose name is ever associated with that of the slaughtered King, namely, Maximilien de Béthune, Baron de Rosny and Duc de Sully. That he was a great soldier, a brilliant ambassador, a splendid financier, an untiring worker and a true friend to Henri in his political, if not in his " private," career, has always been acknowledged. Yet a stain rests on his memory which, in the minds of all historians, and especially in the minds of all French historians, can never be effaced. It has always been supposed, principally owing to his own statements, as will be shown later, that he was aware of the fact that Gabrielle d'Estrées may have died of poison, and that, if she did so, he was acquainted with the intriguers and their plans. The marvel is, however, that in his own memoirs, the *Œconomies Royales*, and, to

a considerable extent, out of his own vanity and desire to show how well-informed he was as to all that was going on in and around the capital, he should have done his best to fasten upon himself an indelible blot which, if believed in, would darken his memory for ever. For, in his usual careless manner of writing—a carelessness of which he could not be unaware—he absolutely tries to prove that Gabrielle d'Estrées did die of poison, and that he foresaw, or, rather, knew, that she would do so and foretold the event before it happened.* As a matter of fact, the unhappy woman had risen too high, her hold upon the passions of Henri had become too strong, to please any of those who surrounded her lover. Created Duchesse de Beaufort, she was soon recognized as the one person who would ere long fill the place of Marguerite de Valois when the divorce she had agreed to between herself and the King should be finally pronounced by the Pope. Already Gabrielle gave audience as a queen and patronized all other female members of the aristocracy; her robes of marriage and of state were in readiness, the acts for the legitimization of the children she had borne the King were in preparation, when the blow fell upon her. Of how Sully knew that it would fall, of the words he uttered before it fell with a view to comforting his wife,

* See, later, the article "Sully."

who was furious with rage at the condescension of Gabrielle towards her, he himself undertakes to show; and, if his own words are to be believed, he stands convicted of the knowledge of a dastardly crime which he, in his great power, could have prevented easily, but which he took no steps to so prevent. We shall, however, see that, in all probability, his desire to present himself before posterity in the light of an astute and perspicacious man led him thoughtlessly to make charges against himself which, if substantiated, would place him on an even lower level of humanity than that to which the Duc d'Épernon had descended. But this he never seems to have perceived. Astute as he had been through his prime and at the height of his power, he appears, when out of office and in his old age, to have possessed all the weaknesses of second childhood and to have babbled egotistically to even his own detriment. Yet it is to Sully that we must turn (and there is no suspicion of his veracity here, whatever opinion may be formed of his methods of producing his great memoirs, which will be dealt with later), when we would discover what the opinion of the King was on the subject of getting rid of his wife, Marguerite, and taking to himself a new one, namely, his mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrées.

It should, however, be previously stated, on the

authority of the above, which is corroborated by De Thou and Bassompierre, that Henri early in his career marked out for himself ten principal objects—he called them his "wishes"—the attainment of which was to be the principal aim of his existence, and which, he said, he should never cease to pray God to grant him. They are interesting enough and, one may say, quaint enough, to justify quotation here.

The first wish was that God should always protect him in this life and have mercy on him in the next: a desire which has nothing particular about it since it has probably been that of ninety-nine people in a hundred who have ever existed.

The second was that he should never lose his health but remain always vigorous in mind and body—of which the same remark may be made as of the first.

The third was that he should continue to struggle for the preservation of his religion and his party, viz., the Huguenot Faith and the Huguenots—a desire which, considering his twofold conversion, he certainly did not exhibit much eagerness to obtain.

His fourth—perhaps the most quaint of all—was that God would deliver him from his wife and that he might find another equal to his own birth and quality (Marguerite's own birth was, as a matter of fact, immensely superior to that of Marie de Médici, her family on her

father's side being the most illustrious in Europe); that she would love him and that he would love her, and that she would be of easy and gentle nature and provide him with children so soon after their marriage that he would still have many years left to him in which to make them brave, gallant and accomplished. Of all this we shall see how much was accorded, and, also, for how much he was responsible in whatever failure of realization took-place.

The fifth wish was that he should obtain the throne of France and enjoy a long and happy reign, make the country splendid and the people happy, and be able to reward all those to whom he was indebted for their loyalty and their help toward his success. This, of all his desires, was the one that came nearest to accomplishment.

The sixth was that he should either recover his kingdom of Navarre (the greater, or Spanish, portion of it having been appropriated by Ferdinand the Catholic, in 1513, and incorporated with Castille), or seize Flanders or Artois (they being then in the hands of Spain) as compensation, and, consequently, suitable for exchange in return for his own country. Practically, this desire was never obtained. Only a small portion of Navarre remained to Henri, and that alone was joined to France when he had secured the throne of that country.

The seventh was that he might eventually obtain a great victory over the King of Spain—who was at that time Philip II.—and also over the Turks, he being the General of the Christian armies. Neither of these events took place.

The eighth was that, without attacking the Reformed Religion, he might considerably suppress the Huguenot faction and, especially, the Ducs de Bouillon and de la Trémouille, who caused their followers to be more mutinous and troublesome than necessary; but at the same time he hoped to do nothing to cause injury to France or her glory. There is so much tergiversation in this wish that it is better to judge Henri by his future acts and deeds than by what, as a much younger man than he was when he became King of France, he had seen fit to imagine it would be well for him to attempt.

The ninth was that, before he died, Henri should carry out two splendid designs he had in mind without even communicating to anyone what they were, while at the same time he trusted that, by aid of a universal peace between all the conflicting elements in France, these two designs might be brought about. This leaves us almost as much in the dark as does the preceding wish, since, excepting that Henri had become the most powerful monarch in Europe at the time of his death, and that he was also the most popular one, we

perceive little fulfilment of the desire. It is true that he had crushed The League, which was one of his earliest aspirations, and, if Fate had permitted him to undertake the campaign against Spain and Austria, as he would have done had he not been assassinated, it is more than probable he would have achieved a great triumph. But one can say no more than this.

The tenth and last wish was that Henri should eventually find his three greatest enemies, the Ducs de Bouillon, d'Épernon and de la Trémouille, at his feet imploring his grace and pardon for sins of which he might legitimately complain, and that then, after recounting to them all their evil and malicious actions, he should pardon them freely and thereby win their loyalty and affection.* This was the noblest wish of all; this, the desire to forgive those who had intrigued against his ever obtaining the throne he was entitled to by descent; those who had plotted more than once to have him slain, and, at the last, were to set on foot a plot against his life that only failed because their myrmidons were forestalled by a quicker hand. If, however, Henri actually believed, when he wrote down

* It seems possible that Corneille had heard of this wish when, twenty-nine years after Henri's death, he produced "Cinna," and put into the mouth of Augustus Cæsar the noble speech commencing:

"Soyons amis, Cinna. . . . .
Tu trahis mes bienfaits, je les veux redoubler;
Je t'en avois comblé, je t'en veux accabler."

these wishes, that any amount of pardon and clemency would ever soften the hearts of the above noblemen, and especially the heart of one of them, he was far, indeed, from having accurately gauged their characters. His perspicacity does not appear, however, to have been entirely at fault, since, as he indites his last wish, he adds, in speaking of his hopes for their future good behaviour, " which, nevertheless, I do not expect, remembering their evil disposition towards me."

These ten principal desires of Henri were copied down in his own hand and given to Sully (then Rosny) in the gardens of the Château de Gaillon when they were walking together on the terrace, and it was not until two years later, viz., in 1589, that Henri, after a first initial conversation that he and Sully had had on the subject, again referred to them. He did so at Rennes when they happened to be together, and the wish to which he then made reference was the fourth one alluding to his desire to get rid of his wife Marguerite de Valois and to find another who " would love him and whom he could love." His manner of opening the subject with his faithful henchman was absolutely characteristic of himself, and, as will be observed, it dealt with a personage who, had her life not been suddenly cut short, would have caused a total alteration in the history of the Royal Family of France.

After remarking that he was at last peacefully and firmly installed on the throne of France, Henri stated that this fact, comforting as it was, was still incomplete, since he had no children by his present wife and was never likely to have any. He then began a review of all the princesses to whom he might offer his hand when he had obtained the divorce from Marguerite to which that high-born lady was perfectly willing to agree, provided that his next spouse should be a woman of whom, as her successor, she need not feel ashamed; and he instantly commenced to give the list of who those ladies, outside and inside France, were.

Speaking of the Infanta of Spain—who would have been a most important match for Henri—he observed pleasantly that he could accommodate himself very well with her in spite of her ugliness if, by doing so, he could also marry the Netherlands and make them a portion of France. He next referred to Arabella Stuart, who was undoubtedly the lawful heiress of the English throne after King James of Scotland (who might not be selected by Elizabeth), but said that he could scarcely espouse her since neither the King of Spain nor Elizabeth—it was not often that they were allies!—were at all disposed to let Arabella take precedence of James and become Queen of England. He then remarked that there were two or three German princesses who had

been suggested to him but stated that the ladies of that nation did not at all appeal to his tastes, while he went on to say that he did not care to have "a wine-tub" always by his side as companion, and also added that he might find himself saddled with a second Isabeau de Bavière. The sisters of Prince Maurice of Nassau were next passed in review, but as they were of Henri's original faith, they were not suitable. Speaking of Marie de Médici, who was also in the matrimonial market, and was eventually to win the great prize, Henri found no fault with her looks, and, of course, none with what would undoubtedly be the size of her dowry if the King of France elected to marry her. But her family had been merchants and continued to be so, although the head of it had attained to the rank of Grand Duke of Tuscany; while the memory of her late kinswoman, Catherine de Médici, was hateful to him. He then referred to the Princesse de Guise (Princesse de Lorraine), whose position was of the highest and her good looks indisputable, but she had the reputation of being *un peu volage*—although Henri said he did not believe such to be the case. Enumerating other ladies who might be fitted to grace his throne, he spoke of the daughters of his old enemy, the Duc de Mayenne—the head of The League; but one was, he said, too black and swarthy, and the other too young,

while the Princesse de Luxembourg was, like the sisters of Prince Maurice, also a Huguenot; and, in appearance and nature, the Princesse de Conti, who was also available, did not please him at all.

Having computed all the various attractions, as well as the disabilities, of the above-mentioned princesses, and asked Sully's opinion on the matter, a considerable amount of badinage took place, especially on the part of the latter. Consequently, the King found that, before he was likely to receive any opinion whatever from his stubborn though devoted Minister, it would be necessary for him to name the lady whom he proposed to put in the place of Marguerite when the divorce had been procured.

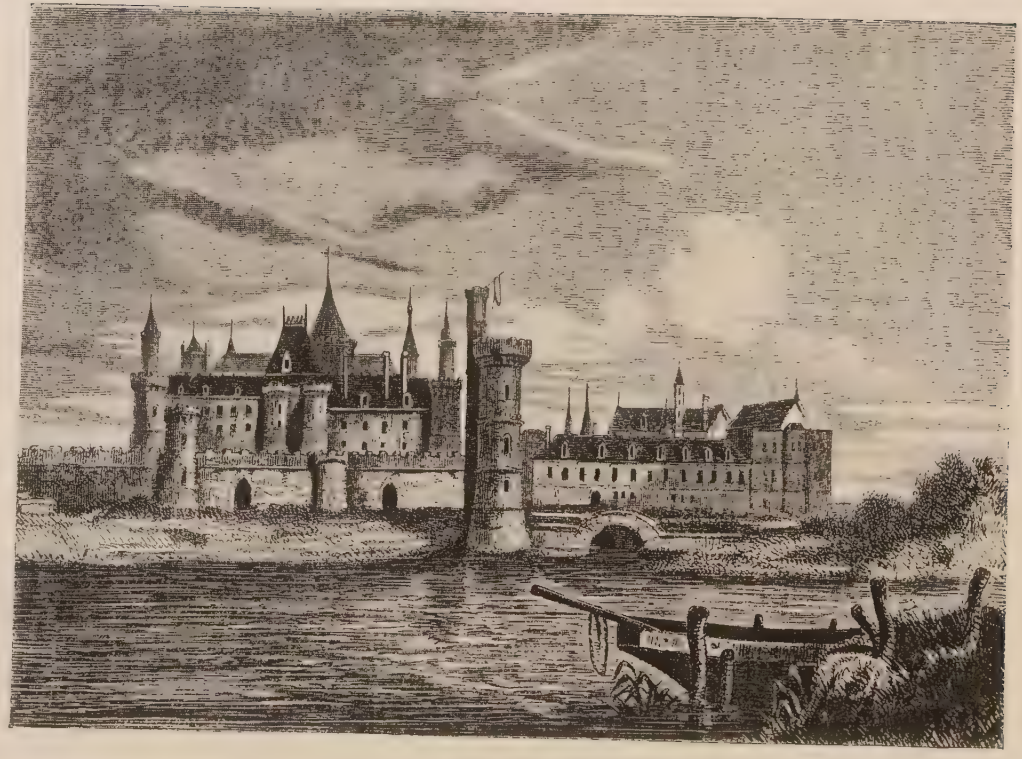
When he did so the information fell like a thunderbolt on Sully. The King named Gabrielle d'Estrées.

At first, Sully was unable to utter a word concerning the information accorded him, but, recovering himself, he indulged in some quotations from Scripture which, though appropriate enough to the lady in question, might well have been dispensed with altogether. After which he proved to Henri that, though it would be quite within his power to make the Duc de Vendôme—who had been legitimatized almost at once after his birth—his heir and, eventually, King of France, the proceeding would cause so much dissension and, possibly,

even civil war, that the country would eventually be brought to ruin. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Henri stood firm and Fate, and Fate alone, prevented Gabrielle from ascending the French throne as queen, since, in spite of the determination of Marguerite de Valois never to accede to a divorce which should leave Henri free to marry *her*, the Pope could easily have been coerced into granting it. He was, indeed, ready to do so at the moment that Fate stepped in.

With regard to Ravaillac and his crime, it is remarkable how few historians, no matter of what nationality they may be, have attempted to prove that which they might easily have proved with ordinary trouble, namely, the fact that a plot existed which did not number him amongst the plotters; or that Ravaillac, if he even so much as heard of the plot, had no connection with it. The bald statement is occasionally made, especially by English writers, that "Ravaillac does not seem to have been mixed up in the scheme to slay Henri," or other words to a similar effect. "Seem" is, however, an unsatisfactory word when it is possible to state definitely that a certain thing is so or is not so. It is to assert the latter and to attempt to prove it to the hilt that these pages are written.

J. B-B.



THE LOUVRE, after restoration by Francis I.

[*Facing p.* 21

CHAPTER I

"THE KING AND HIS CAPITAL"

HENRI IV., King of France and Navarre, was at the time of his assassination in his fifty-eighth year. By his first wife, Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henri II. and Catherine de Médici, from whom he was divorced by mutual agreement, he had no children. By his second, Marie de Médici, he had six. The eldest of these became Louis XIII. of France; the second was a child who only lived four years and a half; the other son was Gaston, Duke of Orléans (the most treacherous and contemptible of all the Bourbons); the daughters were Elisabeth, or "Isabelle," who became the wife of Philip IV. of Spain; Christine, who became the wife of Victor Amadeus, Prince of Piedmont and Duke of Savoy; the last was Henriette-Marie, who became the wife of Charles I. of England.

It has already been said that Henri was the most popular king who ever sat upon the throne of France, and the statement may well be made when drawing comparisons between him and not only those to whom

he succeeded, but those who succeeded him. Before Henri IV. it is possible that Francis I. came nearest in popularity to him, yet Francis lacked the *bonhomie* which Henri possessed; his amours, almost as unfailing as those of the subject of this sketch, still lacked something which, though it could not justify, yet softened the failings of *Le Béarnais*. Francis was too often cruel to women who had resigned themselves to him, while Henri, though he might part from those whom he had once loved, and replace them far too often, was never aught but gentle and kind and, as far as was in his power, good to them in after days.

As regards those monarchs who succeeded Henri, it is almost impossible that a striking comparison should be drawn between him and them. The nearest in resemblance to him, though in a different form of popularity, was undoubtedly his grandson, Louis XIV., yet the people's regard for *Le Roi Soleil* was compounded more of pride and admiration than any sentiment nearly approaching to love. He was great, he was splendid in all that he did—a quality more calculated, perhaps, than any other to capture the hearts of the French; he was almost uniformly successful in his wars with neighbouring countries—with the exception of England—and his manners were perfect. But, nevertheless, he rarely, if ever, appealed

to the emotions of those who admired him. If he rode past peasant-women working in the fields, or, as sometimes happened, encountered a female servant in the corridors, he invariably touched or doffed his hat; but, with Henri, it was a gentle slap on the shoulder, a remark to a girl about her *beaux-yeux*, a question concerning a man's sick child, that was forthcoming. With Louis it was superb and never-forgotten courtesy that was accorded; with Henri, the good-humoured greeting came from the heart.

In France there existed in his day a custom at some inns, especially those in the northern provinces, that the hostess had the right to demand a kiss from any important personage who had patronized her house; and, when *Le Béarnais*, as his subjects loved to call him (from the Province of Béarn in which he was born, at Pau), rested at any such inn the tribute was unfailingly demanded. We know that, with him, the accolade was not only graciously received, but, especially where the landlady was young or good-looking, warmly returned. With Louis XIV. it is doubtful if any landlady would have had the courage to make such a request; or if, had it been so made, it would have been granted. With Louis XIII., son of the one and father of the other, the result of such a request can, when his nervous and austere nature is remembered,

easily be guessed. He would have turned and fled the house.* Of other French rulers, none has ever approached anywhere near to Henri's universal popularity.

This popularity was, however, far greater with the *bourgeois* class than with the aristocrats. The latter never forgave the manner in which he saw through their dislike to his obtaining possession of the throne which was his by direct inheritance, nor the way in which the ladies of their class intrigued for his favours, nor the love which the people testified towards him. They considered, also, that his second change of religion—which was the only thing that could give

* There are numerous instances on record of this King's misogyny. Entering a room in which was seated Mdlle. de Hautefort, for whom he had more than once testified a mawkish, sickly kind of admiration, he surprised her in writing a letter which she instantly folded and held in her hand. Annoyed at this, Louis XIII. demanded that she should show it to him ; a request that was at once refused. Irritated at being disobeyed, the King approached to take the letter from Mdlle. de Hautefort and, on her retreating from him, followed her round the room. Seeing that, without resorting to absolute disobedience, she would be forced to yield up the letter, the young lady thrust it into the lace above her open bodice and exclaimed in desperation : " So be it ! Take it ! " Louis instantly turned and left the room, or, as some writers say, picked up the tongs and took the letter by aid of them. At Dijon, at a banquet given in his honour, Louis, owing to his prudery, performed an action that was not only unworthy of a king and a gentleman, but of any man. A lady sitting opposite him was dressed in an extremely *décolletée* manner, and after regarding her with considerable horror for a brief moment, his Majesty filled his mouth with wine and then, with remarkable precision of aim, squirted the fluid over that which caused him so much offence.

him thorough possession of his kingdom—was an act of deceit committed against them, who had, on their part, committed so many similar acts to prevent him from obtaining that kingdom. They pretended, also, to be embittered against him for the wars into which he had plunged France, while forgetting that, had they been willing to acknowledge his undoubted right to the throne after the death of Henri III., the greater part of those wars would never have taken place.

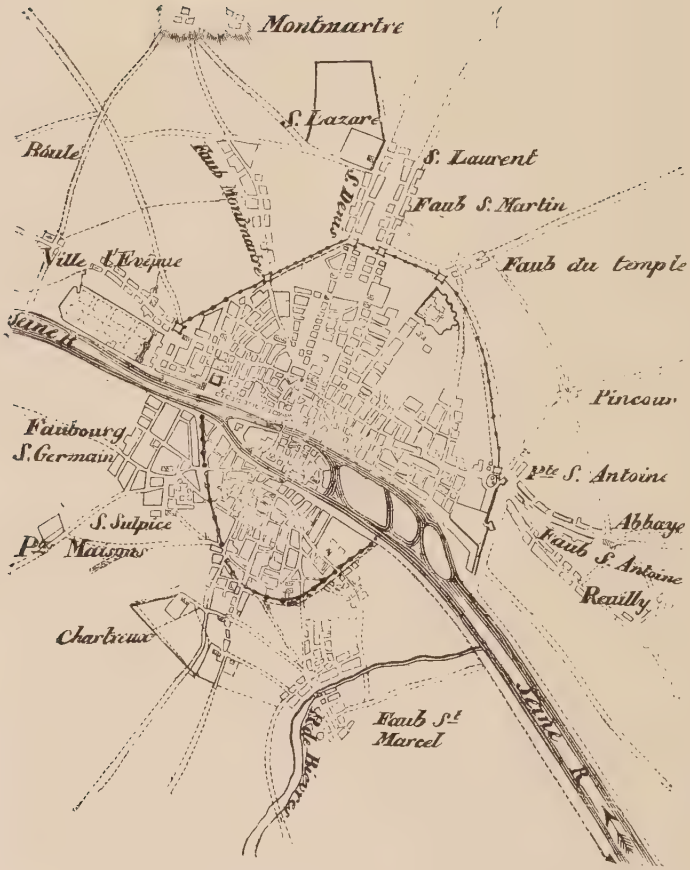
But against Henri there was a still more powerful opposition than the aristocracy, though it was, to a very considerable degree, composed of members of the higher classes. This force was the Church, which had always been bitterly hostile to him, and, after the Edict of Nantes was issued in 1598, loathed him with a loathing that was almost superhuman. From that time, although twelve years had still to elapse ere he met his doom, his assassination was assured. To have escaped death until it should have pleased Nature to allow him to die calmly in his bed, would have been to justify, beyond all possibility of refutation, the statement that there are some men who bear charmed existences. For it was from that time that the long series of attacks on his life commenced, excluding those made before he was King and beginning with the attempt to include him in the Massacre of St.

Bartholomew.* At the period of this awful event, and also of Henri's marriage with Marguerite de Valois, Charles IX. called the former into his presence, and, showing him a heap of slaughtered Protestants, while, at the same time, he uttered many menacing threats, concluded by saying, "*Voilà, la mort ou la messe.*" The compliance of Henri with the King's significant suggestion was the signal for the first outward attempt at assassination. While he was performing his abjuration of the Protestant Faith before the altar of St. Denis, a man named Pierre Barrière attempted to stab him, though, afterwards, at his torture, he confessed that he regretted having taken so sacred a moment for the attempt.

* * * * * *

Paris, during the reign of Henri, was a city which was as well-fitted to afford opportunities to assassins to carry out their hateful deeds as any in Europe. It covered a space of not more than an eighth of the Paris we know now, and the principal part of it stood on ground which, to the fashionable Parisians of to-

* The statement that Charles IX. fired at Henri the arquebus with which he was mowing down Protestants in the streets during the massacre, may be dismissed with contempt. Indeed, it is highly doubtful if Charles discharged the arquebus at any person, in spite of the maniacal state to which he had become worked up at the time. The window from which he is supposed to have fired was not then in existence.



Map of Paris in 1610.

[*Facing p. 27*

day, or the thousands upon thousands of pleasure-seekers who visit the Capital annually, is not known at all. The St. Antoine quarter, which, since the period of the Revolution, and even before, has been regarded as the poorest of all Paris quarters, was then the most fashionable one. It was for long the place of residence of the de Montbazons, the Ducs de la Force (whose house afterwards became the Prison de la Force), the Montmorencies and de Guises, the de Sévignés, and scores of other illustrious families. The Place Royale —where the tournaments were held and where Henri II. was accidentally killed in one by Montgommery—contained in Henri's reign the Hôtels of Sully, of Diane de Poitiers—which was afterwards that of the Duc de Mayenne, the most powerful member of The League after the death of his brother, the Duc de Guise—and numbers of others, and all the mansions either faced or backed upon the Rue St. Antoine. Now, the Place Royale is called the Place des Vosges and, although the houses are still very handsome and the ground well kept, the former are divided into flats and inhabited by tradesmen and clerks, and the latter is used principally by nursemaids and their charges. The Rue des Francs-Bourgeois (in which there is yet to be seen the house built for Gabrielle d'Estrées, as well as the *Allée aux Arbalétriers*, in which Louis d'Orléans was murdered by *Jean Sans*

Peur, Duc de Bourgogne—a shield on a wall, with an inscription, commemorating the place and deed—and also the Hôtel d'Angoulême, where dwelt Diane de France, daughter of Henri II. by an Italian mother, and wife to Farnese, Duc de Castro, and, afterwards, to the eldest son of the Constable Montmorency) is now a horribly mean street filled with low shops and drinking dens.

At this time the principal houses of the afterwards fashionable Quartier St. Germain had scarcely been begun ; not far from where now stand the mansions of almost all who have contributed to the nobility and glory of France, was a gloomy marsh, in which murderers, footpads, and fugitives from justice lurked ; in which, at great distances from each other, were to be perceived solitary manors wherein horrible deeds were often perpetrated ; to which abducted women—either rich or beautiful—were sometimes carried, and in the vaults of which rivals, enemies and false friends were frequently incarcerated until the terrible damp and miasmas that arose morning and night put an end to their inconvenient existences. Indeed, considering the reputation which London has always "enjoyed" in the minds of the French for fog and gloom, it is somewhat remarkable that, with the *Marais* (*Anglicè*—Marsh or Morass) on one side of the river, and the fens and bogs of the place where the fashionable

portion of the Quartier St. Germain afterwards arose on the other, our neighbours should ever have been struck with the peculiarities of our own Metropolitan climate.

The city was, consequently—and owing to there being no suburbs in the true sense of the word—confined in a very small space at this time. The Bastille was just inside the ramparts on one side, the *Bastide* (whence the name) being the outer tower by which the gate of the town-wall at this spot was defended. Outside was the Cours la Reine, when constructed by Marie de Médici on the opposite side of the city; but it was close to the wall there. That old, great wall of Paris, of which the wits said, "*Le Mur murant Paris rend Paris murmurant*," still stood intact. So did the Tour de Nesle, even then spoken of with horror as a place of terrible deeds where princesses inveigled their lovers to sup with them, and later, to avoid exposure, had them stabbed and flung into the Seine or hurled down trap-doors into the river. The tales of this ghastly place, half prison and half *nid d'amour*, have, however, lost nothing in the telling from the days of the early Bourbon romancists to those of Dumas.

The Champs-Elysées were meadows in which cows and sheep grazed, where rabbits could be snared in quantities, and where it was dangerous for anyone who was unprotected to proceed to alone after dark. The

Bois de Boulogne,* which, for over a century, has been the most fashionable resort on the Continent, was a densely-grown wood wherein Henri's first wife had, in her girlhood, often hunted the wild boars in company with one or other of her kingly brothers, Francis II., Charles IX., and Henri III. Even so late as the Revolution it was still a place in which trembling "suspects" hid themselves, and in which the National Guard hunted for them as Marguerite had hunted savage beasts. On the banks of the water that it then possessed, and which is now represented by the lake on which the aristocratic world skates in the winter and round which it drives in the season, otters and badgers had their haunts, and the wildfowl, when they rose, were captured by hawks principally belonging to the Royal Family or the members of the great houses, this being a sport only permitted in those days to the *noblesse.*

Fifty-two years had yet to elapse after Henri's death before the first stones of the present palace of Versailles should be laid, and about half as many ere Louis XIII. erected the hunting-lodge which preceded it, and which St. Simon termed a *petit château de Cartes.* The Louvre was a vastly different building from that which we at present behold; there was a moat round

* Then a portion of the ancient Forêt de Rouvray.

it; a huge space, which is now a narrow one, between it and the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and a street that ran from north to south between it and the Tuileries. The Church of Montmartre, now a superb white temple, which, owing to its great elevation, may be seen by travellers for many miles before they enter Paris from all quarters, was even then a conspicuous object though lacking in any particular architectural beauty, and had been, still earlier, the resort of Ignatius Loyola and his followers.

Returning to the city proper over which Henri reigned, it has to be said that it was gloomy by day and terribly dark by night. It was also shockingly unhealthy. The graveyards were not fenced off, so that persons in a hurry took short cuts across them; the sewers, so-called, consisted of open trenches along which the "drainage" ran when it rained and accumulated when it was fine. There were roads but no footpaths, and on wet days the only escape for foot-passengers from being splashed was in the doorways and *ruelles*, into which they leapt whenever horsemen, or horsewomen, or a man and a woman riding pillion, were seen to be approaching. Of coaches or carriages there were scarcely any, and those called coaches were not what were termed coaches later. Henri's death is always attributed to his being stabbed to the heart "in his

coach," but, in truth, what he sat in on the occasion was more like a char-à-bancs with a tent-cloth thrown over it than aught else. Windows in these vehicles did not exist for the sufficient reason that there were no sides to the latter in which the frames of the former could be set. Ordinarily, there were leather blinds affixed to the roof—generally with the arms of the owner stamped in gold on them, since few public vehicles for hire had any existence—which were rolled up somewhat in the manner that school-maps are rolled when not wanted, and they were only let down when the rain or the sun necessitated their use. They were also of considerable value at night, or in the daytime, when danger was apprehended from cut-throats and assassins generally, as the leather would turn off most blows that could be dealt. Had Henri gone thus—which he would never have consented to do in the daylight—to visit Sully at the Arsenal, his death would not have taken place in the Rue de la Ferronnerie. It would only, however, have been postponed.*

The nights in Paris, outside those of fêtes and illuminations, were difficult things with which to contend. The nobility, when they were in town, occasionally had a lanthorn—with their own colours dyed into the horn so that they might be easily recognized—hung

* *Histoire des Chars, Carrosses, etc.*, by D' Ramée.

outside their great *portes-cochères*. Doctors then, as now, had red lamps, they being generally slung from a high window so that they should not be stolen—it was an age of stealing everything on which hands could be laid; the bagnios had the same. But beyond these there was little to light the city except on the nights when there was a moon. Sometimes, it is true, the passing of a noble from one place to another would cause a momentary light to be distributed around from the torches carried by his retainers, and, if he chanced to be an amiable personage, people who happened to be going the same way as he would attach themselves to his *cortège* for light, as well as for protection from the wretches lurking at the corners of the numerous *ruelles*—which were very much like Scotch wynds—that ran out of all the streets in considerable numbers. In absolute fact, there was as much danger to persons on foot from the want of light as from assassins, for he who should happen to miss his footing in the darkness of one of the streets of old Paris on a wet night was as likely to be drowned in the filth of the open sewers as he was to be throttled, or run through the body by bravos, on a fine one.* Of other lights there might

* Paris was at this time so unhealthy that the King and his Court vacated the Louvre regularly, so that it should be aired and cleaned and made wholesome. The better class of citizens did the same with their houses.

occasionally be encountered that of a lantern slung across the street by a rope, the convenience being due to the benevolence of two opposite neighbours: the Bastille occasionally condescended on foggy nights to have lighted braziers on the top of its towers and, now and again, a church-roof would be lit up in a similar manner. At that of St. Germain l'Auxerrois it was the custom to illuminate its summit on most nights in the winter, partly because, it is supposed, it faced the then principal exit and entrance of the Louvre, and partly because, as the scornful whispered, it was from the towers of this superb edifice that the signal had rung (owing to the clock being put forward an hour by order of Catherine de Médici) for the Massacre of St. Bartholomew to commence.*

It has, however, to be said, that it mattered very little in the days of Henri IV. whether the streets were lighted at night or not; whether the most poisonous malaria emanated from the open drains or not, or whether assassins lurked or did not lurk at every street corner and beneath every tradesman's bulk. Life was, in any case, still as insecure as it had ever been in the days of his predecessors, and, undoubtedly, far more insecure than it ever was to be in those of his

* In contradistinction to this statement of the old writers, many modern ones contend that the signal was sounded from La Sainte Chapelle close by.

successors—excepting always the latter period of Louis XVI. and that of the Revolution. This was probably owing to the fact that there was always at this time a vast number of soldiers in and around the Capital—indeed, it is hardly too much to say that, excluding the very young and the very old (those under fifteen and those over seventy) and also the priests, every man was a soldier. In many cases even the priests were fighting men, and active ones. During the Siege of Amiens by Henri, the Cardinal d'Autriche took the head of a small army sent against the former; several bishops also commanded bodies of troops, and the monks and priests of Paris took arms against the Protestants during The League. The internal wars were, to a great extent, responsible for this insecurity; so, too, was the large army which Sully insisted on having always in a state of readiness; and so, also, was the fact that, in Paris, almost every man capable of bearing arms enrolled himself in some company, or guild, which was vowed to defend the city to its last gasp. Amongst all these, many were mercenaries fighting under whatever banner gave promise of most pay and plunder, and mercenaries when disbanded, or when at ease, were ever the worst species of individuals that could be let loose among a general public. To this fact has to be added another—namely, that the great

captains of the day had each at their back a vast following of spears, or lances, all of whom took their mode of conduct from that of their masters. Sully had nearly a thousand of these individuals at his beck and call, and Sully, whatever his rugged virtues may have been, was a rough, harsh man; the Duc d'Épernon had from seven to eight hundred, and d'Épernon, without any virtues at all, was a truculent bully; De Mayenne had, in actual fact, the whole of The League at his command, and probably possessed more vices—including the supreme one of treachery—than almost any other member of that vast association; the Duc de Mercœur rode with about five hundred lances behind him, and the following anecdote will tend to show what kind of individual he was.

Accompanied one night by twenty or thirty of his followers—they were enough for what was to be done! —the Duke forced his way into the house of Monsieur Servin, *avocat au parlement.* On seeing the Duke, the other saluted him civilly, and wished him good evening. To this the intruder replied that he had not come to Monsieur Servin's house to wish anyone good evening or to have it wished to him, but to cut his host's throat. The host, naturally surprised at this extravagant form of answer, remarked on the intemperance of such language and behaviour, especially in the house of a

Minister of the Crown, and continued that, if the Duke had any grievance against him, he had better appeal to the King. To this the Duke answered, while drawing his sword, that M. Servin had stated in the Chamber of Edicts that he was not a prince, as he styled himself, and that there were no recognized princes except those of the blood-royal. He would then have put his threat into execution had it not been for one of his accompanying friends who forcibly prevented him from doing so.

Brutality and insolence were, indeed, the particular qualities of the nobility in this and the succeeding reign, though the nobility by no means considered themselves to be either brutal or insolent. Government of their families, their servants and their military followers, as well as of the lower orders, had necessarily to be by *la main-forte* since, between the latter and their rulers, there was a greater line of demarcation fixed than could now exist between a man and his stable-boy. Indeed, any man who should now ill-treat a dog as the nobles of this period then ill-treated human flesh and blood that had offended them would be prosecuted and punished.

And yet, had those nobles been remonstrated with by persons whose standing gave them the right, or power to do so—say, a King, a Queen, or a Confessor—

they would not only have been extremely astonished at the remonstrance, but also hurt; and they would certainly have offered what they considered a sufficiently good explanation of their behaviour if they condescended to offer one at all. They would have pointed to the fact that their own lives were constantly menaced by assassins—which statement was, indeed, incontrovertible; that in most cases their servants hated them, owing to the still existent laws of Villenage which actually gave their order the rights of life and death over those servants, and that, since their own lives were daily jeopardized in the unceasing wars, it was not unnatural that, in times of peace and repose, they themselves should exercise stern justice on those who owed their very existence to them. But, faulty as such an argument might easily be proved to be, they could have adduced a further one which was indisputable. They could have stated with absolute truth that when their soldiers, their domestic servants, their woodmen and agricultural labourers, as well as the very priests on their estates, grew old and past work, the remainder of their lives was well-provided for. They might have said that they stood in the position of fathers to all who had served them and their families well; that their fortresses became the asylums of their aged followers; that their money provided the Masses for the

repose of their souls and for the ground wherein they were laid to rest, as well as for the comforts that cheered their declining years. Nay, more, they could have declared with equal justice that the daughters of their servitors were dowered by them; that their own wives, haughty dames and *châtelaines* though they might be, furnished those daughters with their marriage outfits, provided them with all they required when they brought children into the world, and, in many cases, saw that the children were well looked after by their successors. Nor was this all. When the wandering minstrels came, or the troop of strolling players, or *jongleurs*, and begged to be allowed to perform in the hall, it was not only those who ruled the great house, but also those who served them, who witnessed the entertainment. When winter evenings were in their full severity; on Ember Eves when the wassail-bowl was filled high; on Christmas nights when the monks came in to give their representation of "The Birth in the Manger," the servitors, men-at-arms, and others formed part of the audience, drank of the spiced wine that was passed round, received their portions of the roasted pea-hens and swans, their share of the *massepain* and sweetmeats and of the vails and gifts, and were all one of a great family over which their lord and lady presided.

It was no wonder, therefore, if the latter could look only on those beneath them as creatures whose lives were theirs to do with as they chose, though, at the same time, extreme cruelty or absolute death was never the portion of the lower orders at the hands of their superiors except for two things, namely, treachery or insolence.

But to familiarize ourselves with even such a state of existence as this, a recollection of the period under discussion must always be preserved in our minds. Treachery practised by men who, no matter how lowly, had always by their side some weapon, in a city where there was more darkness than light, and in which there were more narrow and tortuous streets and alleys than there are burrows in a rabbit-warren, could, if the intended stroke failed, be only punished in one way, namely by instant death. To give the "serpent an opportunity to sting twice" was to court the certainty of sudden death for themselves sooner or later. Henri III., miserable creature though he might be, was still a Valois and treated with disdain the earlier attempts on his life; and, at last, the attempt succeeded. Henri IV. treated with equal disdain the far more numerous attempts to slay him, while, since he was a fatalist, his indifference was owing to his belief that if it was to be it

THE TOUR DE NESLE (Period Henri IV.).

[*Facing p.* 40

would be, and that if it was not to come it would not come.*

It is to show the treachery that gradually gathered round the ill-fated Henri IV. that this book is partly written, while its principal object is to prove that though "Treason did his worst" with him, it failed in its efforts and that more simple and fanatical means accomplished the deed which treachery had meditated.

Before proceeding farther upon the absolute matter in hand, it will be as well, however, to give a still more extended description of Paris as it was in the days when plot after plot was being laid against the life of the King, and also a more full description of the life led within its ramparts.

Omitting more remarks than are absolutely necessary on the morality of the city, which morality, if the truth must be told, had scarcely any existence at all at a time when the whole Capital was more like one vast Agapemone than aught else, it may be stated that the two principal vices were gambling and duelling. As regards the former of these two, there was no worse sinner in

* It is remarkable that all the Henris of France died by violence. Henri I. was almost certainly poisoned, Henri II. was killed by the lance of Montgommery in a tournament in the Place Royale (there were some who said intentionally), Henri III. was stabbed by the monk, Jacques Clément, and Henri IV, by Ravaillac.

Paris than the King himself, while that which made his fault the greater was the fact that he was never in possession of sufficient money to permit of his gambling at all.

It was the custom in this reign, as in previous and successive ones, for the whole of the inhabitants to visit *La Foire Saint-Germain* annually, and there, at night-time at least, to indulge in a licence of dissipation and extravagance which has, probably, never been equalled at any other place or in any other period. In the day-time, the fair was like a vast cosmopolitan market to which came, from all parts of Europe, dealers and merchants who had anything worth selling. Here could be purchased the skins of bears slain in the Ural or Carpathian Mountains; horses from England or Ireland—then, as now, the countries known for their pre-eminence in horse-breeding; armour and weapons made by the master-hands of Milan or Toledo; black boys reported to have been brought by Portuguese missionary-monks from mid-Africa, and fair-haired maidens supposed to have been torn from their parents in Circassia, though often believed to have been stolen from no farther off than the coasts of Normandy or Brittany, or those of Sweden or Norway. Silks, too, from China, Siam and the Indies were to be purchased here, and were sold with the undoubtedly

fictitious guarantee that they had been stolen from the Palace of the Great Mogul, while, at the same time that the rich nobles were buying these things and occasionally evading payment of them, trifles so inconsiderable as to be within the reach of the humblest peasant were also on sale. Wooden whistles for the children, made on winter nights in the peasants' cabins of the Black Forest, as well as clocks, were there; so, too, were dolls and toy-horses and dolls'-houses—differing in scarcely any particular from those sold at the present day in England; and daubs on paper of the Adoration of the Magi, The Sacred Birth, The Last Supper and The Crucifixion. But there was also a great trade in books going on at this fair. Almanacks, such as those of Frankfort previously referred to, found a ready sale, for, though they were not almanacks in the modern acceptation of the word, they contained recipes for healing wounds, colds and coughs, the bites of vipers and mad dogs and the ailments of maternity or of old age, as well as recipes for cooking and the making of preserves of all kinds of things from sloes and boluses and quinces—the fruits and, for want of others, also the vegetables of the period—to snails and slugs. Yet, in these days, not one person out of thirty of the whole population of France could read with ease, and not one out of seventy-five could write a letter

which anyone else could read at all. These almanacks were, however, accompanied by illustrations—always the most rude of woodcuts—which no one could fail to understand. They were, indeed, of a terrifying and repellant nature and, outside those dealing with religious matters—which, however, were not always exempt from censure—were often disgusting. Nevertheless, a better class of book was to be procured, a form of literature perused by noble ladies in their *tourelles* and rush-strewn boudoirs, or behind the silken hangings of their beds in which they passed so much time when left alone by their lords, or when it was impossible for their vast and draughty mansions to be properly warmed and heated in the winter. Among these would be found books of love and adventure, the "*Commentaires*" of the Marshal de Montluc, which Henri IV. called "*La Bible des Soldats,*" and was the production of one of the most savage and bloodthirsty soldiers that any country ever produced*; the "*Histoire de Bayard, Chevalier Sans-Peur et Sans Reproche,*" and the "*Histoire Générale des Larrons,*" published a little later in the reign of Louis XIII., and, perhaps, the prime favourite of all. It is now a rare book, the first edition of which was unknown to Brunet, yet the

* He remarks in his *Commentaires*: "*On pouvait cognoistre par ou j'étais passé, car par les arbres on trouvait les enseignes. Un pendu estonnait plus que cent tuez.*"

revolting crimes which it narrates must have endeared it to the highly-sharpened appetites of the ladies and gentlemen of its time, and have caused it to obtain a considerable sale.*

It was at night, however, that what, with very little license, may be described as the "fun of the fair" commenced; the gambling set in and darkness lent her aid to many things that would not bear the light of day. Cloaked and masked ladies, who were clad as pages underneath, and who often carried (either as disguises for themselves or as weapons wherewith to injure their rivals) colours and badges that were *not* those of their own illustrious houses, appeared on the scene; scriveners, clerks, and others dressed in the cast-off garments of their betters were also there, and, with swords which they little knew how to use, strutted about until accosted by men of a higher rank, when they generally took to their heels. The bullies, the *matamores* and *bretteurs* of the day, were likewise much in evidence, and so, too, were the purse-lifters, the gentlemen who would cut the cords by which the cloaks of others were suspended from their shoulders, and

* The author's copy, which he picked up in France for a few pence, is beautifully printed and would disgrace the production of many books of to-day. The pages have, however, undoubtedly been turned over by the fingers of several generations. It possesses over five hundred of these pages, every one of which describes something horrible or disgusting.

the men who lay in wait to fall upon the successful gamblers as they left the booths where the tables were set out.

Of the gamesters of high estate who frequented this delectable haunt, the King was, as has been said, one; and his losses were, for a man of his scanty means and for his time, often stupendous. One January night he lost at dicing at this fair twenty-two thousand pistoles (equal to nearly forty-five thousand pounds of our money at the present day), and Sully had to find the sum out of the State Funds within twenty-four hours.* This is but one example of great losses which he sustained in the same manner and was also but one of his various forms of extravagance, of which the following are instances.

From the time Gabrielle d'Estrées held Henri in her net and was so near to the throne that she would have undoubtedly ascended it had she lived longer, and had not Marguerite de Valois refused to consent to her divorce from the King, and, thereby, resign her place to so degraded a woman as the other, Henri squandered money on her to which he had no right whatever, since it belonged to the finances of the State; and, in doing so, he almost reduced France to bankruptcy. At the baptism of the son of Gabrielle's aunt, Madame de

* *Journal de l'Estoile.*

Sourdis, the favourite appeared in a black satin robe so weighted with precious stones that, before the ceremony was concluded, she was unable to stand any longer. A week later, Henri purchased for her—and had to pay ready money for it, since the jeweller would not give him credit—a handkerchief which had cost nineteen hundred crowns.* While he was thus lavishing his money on his mistress he did not stint himself, his excuse being that he must appear as well-dressed in State ceremonies as his nobles, and that the money spent was won at the gaming-table—which was not true, since he was not only a singularly unlucky player but, if most accounts are to be believed, was often cheated. He bought himself at this time a court-sword ornamented on the handle and scabbard with diamonds, for which he paid one hundred thousand crowns, and for a costume to wear at the baptisms of his various children he paid fourteen thousand crowns, it being composed of cloth of gold embroidered with pearls.†

Henri had, however, been so shockingly poor at the time of his predecessor's death that the aristocratic rulers of the various provinces, themselves mostly men of large means, exclaimed that it was impossible to permit him to become King of France. When he was informed of the assassination of Henri III., and hastened

* L'Estoile. † Bassompierre.

to St. Cloud in the hope of seeing the unhappy victim before he expired, and, doubtless, in the hope of obtaining Henri de Valois' last word in his favour as heir (which word had been uttered before his arrival), he had no suitable clothes to assume. Indeed, had Henri III. not been himself in mourning for his mother at the time of his death, Henri IV. could not have assumed any fitting apparel. But the former's doublet of purple—the royal mourning—was altered to suit his successor and cut down to his smaller size, and when he entered the death-chamber everyone present recognized that, and the cloak, as the property of the dying man. The apparent vulgarity of the above-mentioned personages probably did not truly express their opinions on the difference between rich and poor men, but, since they were all Leaguers, the circumstance served to raise one more objection against their hated antagonist.

Meanwhile, to keep the King in countenance the whole of Paris followed in his footsteps, though the nobility surpassed him in at least two things in which he could not indulge, namely, in duelling and robbing, as well as murdering, people on the highway. At the Foire St. Germain fights took place not only between individuals, but between different bodies of men. A number of royal pages fought lackeys who had been

insolent to them, and, in one case, when a nobleman's servant cut off the ears of a student and put them in his pocket, the other students slew nearly all of the menial's companions. Soldiers fought indiscriminately against hired bravos, the lackeys, the pages, and the unoffending citizens, and were often killed by being outnumbered, so that, when the officers in command of them came out of one of the many "*Académies de Jeux*," they occasionally found that there was no protection for them, and that they were in imminent danger of being murdered themselves.

These nocturnal performances, which, indeed, more resembled the street-fights of later days than anything else though they were much more dangerous, stand far removed from the duels which hourly took place, or from the highway robberies by which the nobility and gentry frequently refilled their purses after they had been emptied in the *tripots*. The Baron de Sancy, sent by Henri to recruit soldiers in Basle—Switzerland being then the great dépôt of mercenaries, and he the Captain of the Swiss Guard—heard that twenty-two travellers, each of whom had over four thousand crowns sewn up in his saddle, were approaching that ancient city, which was then, as it still is, one of the chief gates of Central Europe. Seeing in their arrival the opportunity of paying the advance necessary to secure the

services of the mercenaries, he went forward with his own following to meet the merchants, captured them, seized their money, and then hanged them all to the trees. The Baron de Fontenelle was broken alive on the Place de Grève for practising brigandage on land and piracy at sea, and for being supposed to have joined in one of the many plots formed against the King's life. A very young gentleman whose name is not given, but who was superbly dressed when captured, was executed in the same place for highway robbery and other " strange acts," and for slaying a creditor who demanded his money. Monsieur de Lagrange-Santerre would have been spared by the King if he could have proved that he had not been accustomed to rob people on *Les grandes routes,* but the evidence produced against him was to the effect that he had been a highwayman from his boyhood, that his father was in prison on the same charge at the time he was tried, and that his grandfather had been executed for similar crimes. A month later, two of his brothers were also executed on like charges.

The list of these *exploiteurs* is too long to permit of more than a few solitary instances being quoted, but it is worth observing that those who possessed good-looking female relations, or good-looking female friends, who could in some manner obtain audience of the King,

were hardly ever executed. Henri's ruling passion was well known and well utilized.

To select any instances of duelling that stood out in a strong light during this reign would be impossible, since, from the time of Henri's accession in 1589 to the year 1607, four thousand gentlemen perished in these encounters in spite of the edicts against duels. For, independently of the conflicts which might arise from the most ordinary causes for such combats, namely, jealousy, rivalry, revenge, or disputes over gambling, women or wine, these bloodthirsty affairs frequently formed part of the "amusements" of the day. Parties met to breakfast or dine or sup together with the distinct understanding that the "festivity" of the occasion should be concluded by a visit to the Pré aux Clercs, or the Place Royale, or the host's garden, wherein sides should be made up and an all-round duel fought between those who, an hour or so before, had been drinking healths to each other or toasting the charms of their own and each other's lady-loves. Once the affair was over the greatest harmony again prevailed—between those who still survived! The bodies of the fallen were despatched to their homes, the wounded were sent to the hospitals, or to their friends or relatives, and those still unharmed prepared to continue their carouse or to commence a fresh one. The horrible duel between the

mignons of Henri III. and Bussy d'Amboise and his friends was of a similar nature to these. On other occasions, when even such a general *mêlée* was not considered sufficient excitement, large parties would send notice to some nobleman or grand seigneur that, on a certain day, they purposed presenting themselves outside his house and would esteem it an honour if he, with a similar following, would be prepared to meet them and to indulge in a friendly encounter. The invitation was scarcely ever refused. Had it been, the person to whom it was sent would have been ostracized.*

In religious matters it was naturally a stormy time. The old original religion, the Faith that had been that of the whole of Europe—which formed in those days the whole of the world worth counting—until something under a century earlier, had everywhere received terrible shocks. England was gone from out its fold for ever —the great Queen Elizabeth had made that certain !— so, too, were many German and more northern States ; half of the States of the Swiss Confederacy had embraced Protestantism, or were about to do so, and in France Henri's followers—in spite of his own two-fold apostacy—were now becoming more and more numerous since, at this time (namely, the latter half of Henri's

* Bussy Rabutin, writing of a period nearly fifty years later than Henri's death, narrates an almost similar occasion in which he played a part.

reign) the Edict of Nantes consolidated their power and their safety. Nevertheless, in France The League was, if shorn of much of its strength, still powerful, and behind The League there stood the great body of the French people. They, at least, showed no sign of dissent, while their feelings, based upon the admirable, if homely, reflection that what had been good enough for their forerunners to live and die under was good enough for them, did not undergo, and have never yet undergone, change. Moreover, there were vast districts, indeed, whole provinces, in which it is very doubtful if the words "Reform," or "Reformation," in connection with religion, had ever been heard. Nor, had these words been uttered would they have been understood, while, if such had been the case, the utterance of them might possibly have been fateful to the utterers. All over the land the people saw the great cathedrals whose hoary existence dated from far beyond the time to which ran the memory of man : at Rheims, for instance, they worshipped in the vast and solemn fabric in which their kings had been crowned since the time of Louis *le Débonnaire*, and in the original of which fabric Clovis had embraced Christianity. At Troyes, the ancient capital of Champagne, the most disastrous invasion of France had come to an end by the marriage in the Cathedral of the English conqueror, Henry V.,

to the daughter of their own King ; here, too, they knew that Joan of Arc had ridden in triumphantly and knelt in thankfulness before the High Altar, and here, also, their own King, the *Béarnais*, had forced The League to open its doors to him.

Throughout all France, from north to south and from east to west, it was the same ; every massive cathedral and almost every village church told the story of how, around and within their walls, the only Faith they knew, or ever desired to know, had been the comfort of their forefathers in their lives and their solace in the hour of death ; that here were the spots in which they had heard the promises of pardon and salvation on the Day of Judgment. Nor, in the Capital itself, was there any lack of that spiritual food which all, no matter whether ferocious noble, honest bourgeois, or thief and murderer about to be broken on the wheel or burnt alive, desired at some hour of their uncertain existences. Upon the little island in the river the ancient Cathedral stood as it still stands, the shrine of tranquillity and, in those days, the sacred domain of sanctuary ; the personification to the minds of all, whether King or beggar, of a peace yet to be theirs that should pass all understanding. And all around that little isle—around the great House of God, not yet so black as Time and weather have caused it to become—were churches that could vie with

THE CHURCH OF LES INNOCENTS,
showing the open graveyard called the Cemetery of Les Innocents.

[*Facing p*, 55

the mother one in beauty and antiquity, and from which issued forth daily the promise of eternal hope for the life to come.

Nevertheless, since religion played so great a part in the lives of all who dwelt in what were, still, almost medieval days; since, from the lips of her ministers were uttered words of advice—of sometimes gentle reproof, and of, above all, pardon for sins committed again and again, it is to be regretted that these ministers were so little free from the very faults which they forgave in their penitents, and that their lives did not match better with their words. The sin of the Cardinal de Guise with Gabrielle d'Estrées—then almost a child—will be referred to later; the Cardinal-Archbishop also became the lover of Charlotte des Essarts after she was cast off by the King, and, later, went through a secret form of marriage with her and had an acknowledged family by her. It is, indeed, scarcely too much to say that during this reign there was hardly a dozen of high church dignitaries whose lives were not as sinful as the lives of the most dissolute laymen, nor a priest of humbler orders who was not too fond of indulging in the most gross pleasures of the table. Instances, however, stand out on the other side, and amongst those few whose lives were entirely pure that of St. Vincent de Paul—who in his earlier

days was the Confessor of Marguerite de Valois!—is one.

Charity played a large part in the lives of the well-to-do of these times, and acquitted itself nobly of the credit assigned to it in Holy Writ of covering a multitude of sins. Church dignitaries, however open to reproach in other matters, gave largely to those in need. So, too, did the nobility, and so, likewise, did the rich members of the middle-class. Young women, the daughters of well-to-do traders and tradesmen, were as kindly to the poor as are the "Lady Bountifuls" of our own day in our own land, and as young and earnest French ladies have now become; they fed them, clothed them, and endeavoured to impart some education—their own was not considerable!—to the children, while, as L'Estoile narrates, there were those who daily walked about the districts wherein they lived with, attached to their girdles, a purse full of pieces of silver which they distributed among all who appeared needy or suffering. Queen Marguerite de Valois, after she had consented to her divorce from Henri because of the fact that she was unable to provide him with an heir, gave nearly all her money away in charity, and she, herself, had at this time very little of that commodity to spare in spite of her considerable revenues.

As a set-off against many of the errors of Henri during

his reign—and one that counts in company with his unfailing kind-heartedness and his good-humour, as well as the lack of any spark of cruelty in his disposition —may be placed his desire to beautify Paris. If he did not find the Capital as Augustus said of Rome— " of brick and left it marble "—he, at least, found it a terribly dirty, foul, old place, and improved it vastly. There were houses of the nobility that, it is true, were models of ancient architectural beauty, but they were generally surrounded by horrible slums. Also, there were, of course, the cathedrals and the old churches, of which mention has been made ; but there were no pavements, and, as we have seen, scarcely any lights ; the bridges were rotten, tumble-down things, mostly of wood, through which heavy waggons, and occasionally horsemen, frequently fell into the river, while the Pont Neuf was not completed until after Henri's death. Carriages and cabriolets and carrying-chairs were—as has been said—things almost unheard of, though there was a species of general public conveyance known as a *Patache* which sometimes ran to and from various outskirts of the city, its incoming and outgoing being principally regulated by the state of the weather.

Henri set himself the task of remedying many of the above-mentioned discomforts in so far as means would allow. Nineteen new fountains were erected in

different parts of Paris, from which flowed water that, if not actually of the purest, could be imbibed by man and beast without any fear of certain disaster. For wholesome water was, of all things in the city, the most difficult to obtain. Money could buy the most delicious wines of Bordeaux, or Burgundy, or Champagne,* as well as many other things, but the richest nobles or merchants could not procure pure water by the aid of all their wealth unless they paid to have it imported in skins and barrels from far-off sources. There was, indeed, no possibility of the case being otherwise. The Seine was often loaded with the corpses of suicides or murdered people, and sometimes with the bodies of those who had been executed; it was also the usual tomb of drowned dogs and cats, or of their various newly-born progenies, and not infrequently of the bodies of newly-born children. The uneatable refuse of animals, fish and birds, rejected by the cooks of the great mansions on the banks, also found its way to the Seine, and such drains as were in existence emptied themselves into it. The *Bièvre*—the second river of Paris and on the south side of the Seine—which corresponded somewhat with our old Fleet Ditch, though

* The use of refined sugar as a means to assisting the natural effervescence of any of the wines of the latter province had not then been discovered. Consequently they were drunk as "still" wines, or as almost "still."

it was, and is, much wider, was bordered by the manufactories of dyers and of those employed in similar trades, and the inhabitants who should drink of its water would encounter almost as sudden and certain a death as they would have done from the fangs of a snake. To supply the fountains with more pure water than was otherwise possible, there was erected a machine called *La Fontaine et Pompe de la Samaritaine*, situated four yards below the second arch of the Pont Neuf, which brought to Paris the water from the aqueducts of the Prés' St. Gervais and Belleville. The idea was that of a Fleming named Jean Lintlaër, and it was strongly opposed by the sheriffs and merchants of Paris as they considered that its presence would interfere with the navigation of the river. Henri, however, refused to recognize this opposition on the ground that the Pont Neuf was being built more out of his revenues than out of those of the city. He had his way, and a remarkable machine arose which excited the curiosity of the Parisians and strangers for two hundred years, when it was ordered to be removed by Napoleon I. at the time that he was intent on beautifying Paris. The name of this construction—which at least fulfilled a useful and healthy want—was derived from two gilded bronze figures above it representing Christ and the woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well.

Consequently the fountains erected by Henri conferred upon Paris a boon, if a poor one, such as she had never, heretofore, experienced. But his benefactions did not cease with these. Many buildings were restored, added to and beautified. Several quays were built which replaced, or rather covered, the stony beach of the Seine, from which the public were as utterly unprotected as we are in London, at the present moment, on the towing-path of the south side of the Thames between Putney and Richmond. These quays were, and still are—under, in some cases, other names—those of the Arsenal, l'Horloge, des Augustins, la Mégisserie, de Conti, l'École, and des Orphelins.

The Place Royale was also completed by the addition of its fourth side, and the Place Dauphine and the Rue Dauphine came into existence. Meanwhile, the Louvre was furbished up; in many cases several small rooms were turned into one large one and the place was made more habitable than it had ever been before.

There were, however, other changes taking place during the reign which, though some only were attributable to Henri, are worthy of remark. He was himself a wearer of spectacles, since his sight began to fail him a few years before his death, and it was owing to him that the one shop in Paris where they could be procured was established on the Pont Marchand, at his

suggestion. The glasses he wore were very large and round. Watches, also, began to be carried, and were for a long time termed *montres-horloges*. They were enormous and, in some cases, almost as big as a modern dessert-plate; consequently, they were supported by a chain round the neck and rested on the chests of those who could afford to possess them. Powder for the hair came also into fashion in this reign, but its use was confined to no persons or sex, while the clergy, as well as women of piety, adopted it largely, perhaps with a view to add to the dignity of their appearance. L'Estoile, who did not miss much of what there was to be seen and recorded all that he saw, says he one day encountered in the street three *religieuses*, who had not only powdered their hair, but curled it.

But that which was, perhaps, the worst of the new customs was the now almost universal one of women going masked—as will be easily understood by those who can recognize the opportunities for deception that it created. The habit had come into fashion in the preceding reign, but during that of Henri it increased enormously and was fruitful of evil. A masked woman, clad in a habit such as a rival was known to affect, or with the badge or colours of that rival's family in her bodice or her hat, or on her shoulder, could, and did, sometimes cause incredible woe, especially if the

rival was *suspecte* in the eyes of those who had the power to punish her for her faults. Yet there were even worse wrongs than these to be perpetrated by the aid of the mask. Women desirous of injuring others whom they often imagined had injured them, would procure another form of mask resembling the features of the detested foe. This, placed over their own face and surmounted by hair of the same colour, while arranged in the same fashion as that of their enemy, and with the ordinary mask, or domino, partly disguising the one beneath, could work unutterable mischief. The stab of the hired bravo, the whispered insinuations of false friends, the pen of an unsuccessful rival, were almost harmless in comparison with such treachery as this.* It is, therefore, little wonder that at this time the mask was called by the significant name of *le loup*. An even more suitable term would have been *la louve*.

In this brief sketch of the Paris that, as Henri said, "was worth a Mass" (it was one of those inconsiderate jokes which, in all ages, have often brought ruin on those who uttered them, and, in the case of Henri, helped eventually to cost him his life), it has been impossible to mention more than a few facts connected

* *Lemontey*. The writer says that the number of women injured by this form of deception at this time, and later, was almost incredible. He terms these masks, "*masques-portraits*."

with the state in which he found it on obtaining the throne at last. But if further ideas are desired of what its existence was, it may be added that the comedians, such as they were, were ordered to always conclude their performances at half-past four in the afternoons of spring, autumn and winter, so that the public could get home in safety before dark, while respectable women out after nightfall were always to be accompanied by at least one man who was to carry a lamp and be well-armed.

It was at this time that a census was taken by order of the King, but it was, naturally, very imperfectly made. A better calculation was arrived at by a person whom L'Estoile knew. This individual reckoned the absolute poor as one in every twenty-seven, and, providing that, to begin with, he had accurately gauged the number of paupers in the city, the population of Paris would stand at something like two hundred thousand inhabitants. It is possible that this computation was very nearly a correct one. The streets numbered 413.

Of newspapers there was none, excepting *Le Mercure François*, a poor thing dealing mostly with Court scandal, and of which Richelieu in later days spoke scathingly as "*un recueil de mensonges.*" But there were quaint little pamphlets published on particular

occasions—they were about the size of a quarto sheet of paper and consisted of one sheet only—when there was any out-of-the-way news to be circulated of foreign wars or peacemakings, or descriptions of men of note being broken on the wheel, or of women being burnt at the stake, or of houses destroyed by fire, or of a fresh instance of a nobleman's insolence, or a monstrosity on exhibition. An elephant in the menagerie of the gardens of the Tuileries (Coryate of " the Crudities " has, among others, left us a description of such sights as these) received the honour of a notice, and so did " a monster " on show, which was simply a predecessor of the Siamese twins of our own time, since it consisted of two recently-born children who were joined together as one single body. Marie de Médici went to see these as a rare novelty—as probably they were.

The comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne also obtained occasional announcements in these printed sheets of forthcoming performances which the King and Queen often went to see. Henri, however, frequently fell asleep during the representation, especially when the Italian players took the boards, though, since one of the chief of them was eighty-seven years of age and was supposed to be a sprightly dancer, it is not perhaps remarkable that his Majesty should do so.

Of other matters pertaining to social life, it may be

mentioned that it was a terrible time for the use of perfumes. Everyone, from the King and Queen down, scented themselves in a manner that would be now intolerable. Indeed, people were recognized by their own particular scents (the plot of more than one of the buffo-comedies of the day revolved on this fact), and the novelists also used the custom freely as a matter for ridicule. In Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné's* "Baron de Fœneste," the author states that "a gentleman is known by his scent"; and in Sorel's *Histoire comique de Françion* one character exclaims to a very flamboyant hero: "How you are scented!" to which the other replies: "Scented! Do you not know that I am about to appear as the King?" As for the Queen, she scented everything—her clothes, her hair and her linen, and placed sachets of Italian perfumes in the drawers of every chest and cupboard she possessed.

That Henri used scent was owing to the fact that, as he passed the greater part of his life in the saddle and often slept for hours when riding slowly on long journeys (he was so short that he could hardly ever get on to the back of a horse without the use of a mounting-block, a fallen tree, a stone or a helping hand), he considered he was not always an agreeable neighbour. Indeed, in his case vanity could not have been the cause of his

* Grandfather of Madame de Maintenon.

using scent, since, except at high Court and State functions, his appearance was little short of slovenly, though often enough this arose from the fact that in his errant life before he had gained the throne of France he could not always find the opportunity for changing his clothes or removing them for his night's rest, or even for washing himself or brushing his hair. As regards the latter addition to his appearance, he had, however, a strange dislike to having his hair attended to, or to attending to it for himself. His dress was frequently torn and ragged, his linen was dirty from the constant pressure of the lining of his cuirass upon it, and the dust often remained in his beard and moustache when he made his appearance among the foppish courtiers and splendidly apparelled women in the halls of the Louvre. Yet, notwithstanding all—his diminutive stature, the fact that he stammered somewhat and never spoke French with a perfect accent, his dishevelled clothes and soiled linen—he was the most valiant man in France, and was treated with the deepest reverence by all amongst whom he moved, while his ordinary subjects adored him. His *bonhomie* was, indeed, well calculated to endear him to all. It has been said that his son, Louis XIII., touched his hat to his people, and that his grandson, Louis XIV., took his off to them ; but he, when his subjects saluted him,

replied pleasantly: "Your servant. Your servant," and invariably addressed those nearer his own rank as "My friend," or as "Bellegarde," or "Montbazon," or "Bassompierre," without any prefix at all. It was also his habit to interlace his fingers with those of the persons with whom he shook hands, and to keep them in that position so long as he talked to the others.

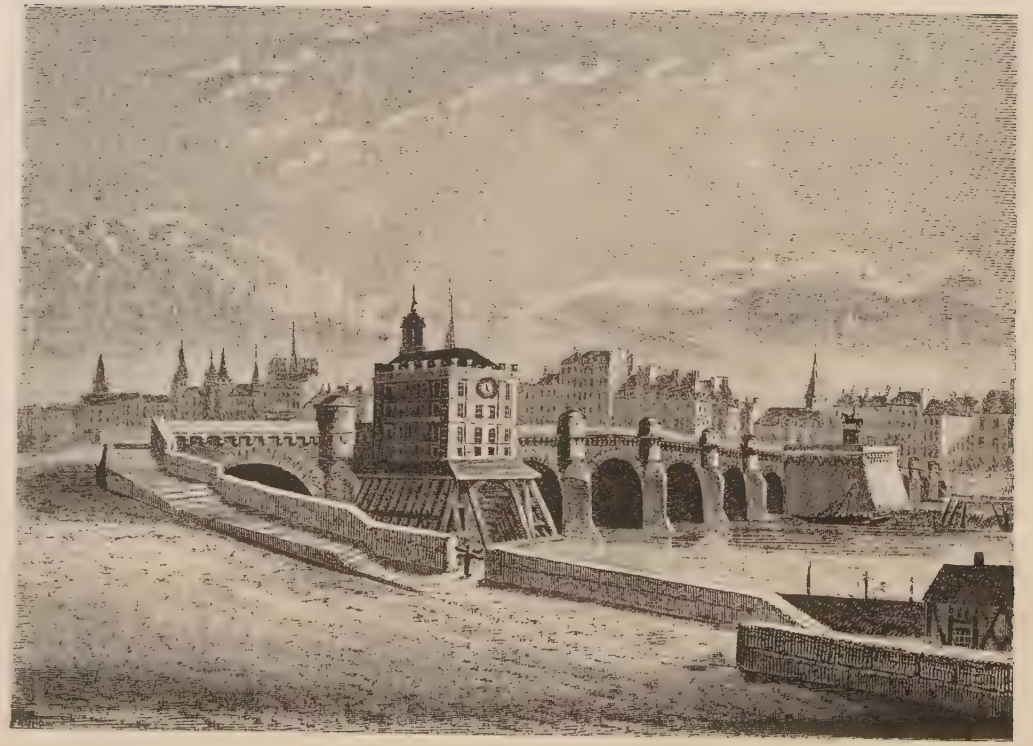
Among other things remarkable about Henri was his enormous appetite, including his love for melons, which he devoured to an extraordinary extent; while, as regards his vast consumption of food, he seems to have been faithfully followed in that respect by his descendants, the four Louis—Louis XIV.'s noble efforts in this direction having most nearly approached his own. St. Simon, in his wonderful summing-up of Louis' performances in this particular, as well as of all his other habits and methods of life, his clothes, manners, and tastes, states that he invariably ate three times as much as most ordinary men, and that his digestive apparatus was found after death to be in about the same proportion to that of other men.

Henri was not ill-educated for his time, in spite of the younger Scaliger's statement that he could not read, which statement was not accurate. He spoke Spanish—it being almost his native tongue owing to the position of Navarre on the map—and knew some Latin; he

also spoke Italian, while his French would not have been bad had his accent been better; but it was, indeed, as Pierre Bayle has said, as good as might be expected. He knew, also, something of classical history, and he had made himself very well acquainted with all the principal events of the magnificent reign of Elizabeth, who only pre-deceased him by seven years. Voltaire, in his "Henriade," indulges in the license of making Henri visit England to see her, though his editors apologize for his doing so on the ground that it was interesting to imagine what the conversation of two such eminent personages would be if they were brought together. It is, however, bad history for a good, though prejudiced historian, to write, even when clothed in a poetic garb and with all due poetical license allowed. Henri, it is almost unnecessary to state, was never in our country.*

His religion, or, perhaps, it had better be said, his religious beliefs, can scarcely be explained. His joke

* Voltaire was, however, none too particular in his statements. He invents a will, or declaration, of Ravaillac, which he could not have seen, for the reason that it never existed. "La Henriade" was dedicated in English to the Queen of England, where Voltaire lived for three years, and the book was published here (London) in 1726. But the Queen at that date was Sophia of Zell, who never came to England, but was divorced by her husband and kept a prisoner for life at Ahlden. Yet Voltaire speaks of her as "the protectress of all arts and sciences" and compares her to Elizabeth in her personal virtues. (See Marmontel's preface to edition 1785.) There was thus no Queen until 1727, when George II. became King.



La Samaritaine, as it appeared before the French Revolution.

[*Facing p.* 69

about the Mass, which injured him more than anything else could have done in the eyes of his people—if anything could injure him in the eyes of those who looked upon him as their earthly saviour—was in a manner corroborated, though, privately, by his confession to Marie de Médici that, when he became a Roman Catholic, he only did so to obtain the throne of France. On the other hand, the Landgrave of Hesse stated that Henri had once informed him that he was still devoted to the reformed religion, and that, before he died, he intended to make a public confession on the matter. Richelieu was acquainted with both these statements, and, Richelieu-like, does not appear to have believed either of them. As it was, however, his business, in his own interests—as always!—to keep Louis XIII. secure upon the throne during his own lifetime, he probably never said so openly and only confided his opinions to the paper on which he wrote his memoirs.

Ten years before the death of Henri there was no real theatre in Paris, since that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne was little better than a dancing-place in which women no longer young, and never good-looking, capered and figured before an audience principally composed of the boatmen and fishermen of the Seine. Later, this place was to become the cradle of the Théâtre Français, and in its successors the tragedies of Corneille and the comedies

of Molière were to be performed before the most aristocratic of audiences—but that time was still unborn.

Light was, however, about to dawn upon the drama. In the year of the King's death a writer named Honoré d'Urfé published the first part of a romance entitled "Astrée," which had an enormous success and was read with enthusiasm over the whole of Europe, while its popularity served to show that there was a public which, provided it was supplied with beautiful thoughts expressed in noble language, was willing to become deeply interested in forms of art that did not rely for their popularity on obscenity, immorality, and the tricking of too confiding husbands. The success of this novel may have been, and doubtless was, inspired by the Stage. For some years earlier a change had become apparent on the boards; passion, it is true, was still the greatest mainspring of plays, but it was passion that was expressed in a manner which need shock no modest woman who had passed her teens, while, at the same time, vice was always defeated instead of being always successful, as had hitherto been the case. Consequently, the frowsy old posturers and worn-out, painted harridans who had hitherto danced and sung, or attempted to dance and sing, the characters of young lovers and innocent maidens, fell farther and farther into the background and gradually disappeared altogether.

The dramatist who principally availed himself of the opportunity to do for the Stage that which D'Urfé was afterwards to do for Literature, was a man of great gifts, though, until this change was inaugurated, he had profited but little by them. His name was Alexandre Hardy (often mis-spelt Hardi or Hardie), and for some years he had been engaged in writing so-called plays, interludes, the words of musical pieces, songs to be acted and sung with vulgar and significant gestures, and other matter of a similar nature. He also controlled a wandering company, and, it has been said, thought nothing of writing every morning a new play, or *divertissement*, which his troupe learnt in the early afternoon and immediately afterwards played to its audience.

But he was made of better stuff and for better things than this.

A new theatre was required, something superior to that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and it was founded in a garden that was in the old Rue du Temple, Hardy becoming the author who supplied it with plays, as well as being the proprietor of it in part, if not wholly so. He provided such plays to the extent of six hundred in twenty-three years, his fecundity of production not having been destroyed by the new style of composition which he had undertaken. Nevertheless, he had thoroughly changed that style and his methods, and the

dramas which poured forth from his pen were serious and well thought out, the various characters were properly balanced, and, as far as yet could be, they were pure. The attempt succeeded, the theatre was open three times a week—a remarkable thing in those days!—his actors became comfortable in their circumstances and relieved others who were in want, instead of themselves cringing for alms from the public, or dying of starvation in the streets.* As Guizot has truly said on this subject: "When the former actors died of hunger there were soon no others, and, consequently, no dramatic authors. But Hardy found for his actors the means of living, and thereby performed the greatest service to art that could be rendered."

Hardy's last works are *Achille et Procris*, a tragi-comedy, and *Alphée*, or "Love's Jealousy," while there is another entitled *Nicomède* which, though it does not bear his name, is so powerful that it is often attributed to him, and probably rightly so. Between him and the splendid dawn of Corneille's genius—which at last far outshone his own brilliancy—there were no other dramatists who approached greatness but Racan, Mairet

* *Histoire du Théâtre Français*, by Les Frères Parfaict, 1745–49. A full and excellent work. De L'Aulnaye, a critic of a hundred years ago, censures Hardy for making a Roman figure in a drama laid in Egypt or Greece. He may have forgotten the Cæsars, Pompey, Mark Antony, and others.

and Théophile,* more poet than dramatist; the latter being the best though not the most popular author, a circumstance not unknown in all forms of art both before and since his time! It has also to be mentioned that in *Mariamne* Hardy wrote a drama that has been considered by critics as almost faultless in its style, and was imitated by Tristan some years after his death and by Voltaire more than a hundred years after that.

Of poets during this reign one towered high, namely, Malherbe, but none equalled those of the reigns of the last of the Valois. There was no Marot and no Ronsard now, while even those had fallen far short of such earlier sweet singers as Bertrand de Ventadour, de Blosseville and Martin le Franc, whose lines beginning

"J'ay nom sans bruit,
Fœuille sans fruit,
Le jour m'est nuit."

have haunted the ears of many generations.

Henri IV. might himself have come down to us as a poet if he were to be judged by the effusions he was in the habit of forwarding to his mistresses, and if, unfortunately, they had not been the productions of de Lominée, his secretary, or of Malherbe, who wrote them for him.

* The author of the celebrated line:

"*Il ne voit que la nuit, n'entend que le silence,*"

since appropriated by dozens of French authors (including Delille, who ought to have known better).

Painting exhibited much medium talent, but scarcely any of the names of the artists of Henri's reign have stamped themselves forcibly on the minds of posterity. The brothers Dumoutier, Bunel and his wife, Toussaint Dubreuil, Ambroise Dubois and Martin Fréminet * are known to connoisseurs and the custodians of picture galleries, but it is to be feared that they are scarcely familiar to the general public. Yet in their time, and in other lands, Rubens was already founding an imperishable name. Guido Reni, the painter of the "Aurora" and the head of "Christ crowned with thorns" (The Ecce Homo), was in the full splendour of his talents,† and Velasquez was taking his first lessons from Francesco Herrera.

Historians, as will be seen by the notes to these pages, flourished abundantly, and most of them were excellent. Legrain, de Thou, d'Aubigné, Madame Du Plessis-Mornay, widow of Du Plessis-Mornay—termed the "Huguenot's Pope"—Matthieu, "historiographer of France," who was commissioned by Henri to write his life and neither leave out his errors nor insert any good qualities which he did not possess, were of them. Of

* Bunel and Fréminet are the only artists of this list who are mentioned in Pilkington's well-known "Dictionary of Painters."

† To Guido is attributed the supposed, and much copied, portrait of Beatrice Cenci. But Beatrice had been executed before Guido lived in Rome, and he was not the man to copy another artist's work.

memoir writers, there were L'Estoile, Sully—to whose remarkable efforts we shall come—the Duc de Nevers, the Duc d'Angoulême, Bassompierre (although he wrote his memoirs of this time in the next reign), d'Aubigné, memoir writer, novelist, poet and dramatist, as well as historian; Groulart, de Sancy—noble, soldier and swashbuckler—de Cherverny, de Villeroy, La Curée, Brantôme (accurate but cynical, and far too free in revealing the peccadilloes of men and women which would have been much better left untold) who was now nearing his end and had retired from the Court and society he loved, and hosts of minor writers.

In consulting these writers it must, however, be borne in mind that, excellent and useful as all of them are in casting a vivid light on a past period which was probably the most fascinating of all French epochs, there existed the greatest possible reason for causing them to be startlingly at variance in their opinions, if not in their facts. That reason was religion. Several of them were of the old Faith; those remaining were of the new. Sully, d'Aubigné and Madame Du Plessis-Mornay and some others, were of the latter. And it has also to be remembered that the Catholic religion is still the religion of France, and that, consequently, the more modern writers, essayists and critics generally, throw doubts on many of the statements made by the

Protestant authors. Sully unfortunately merits these doubts—as will be seen ; but the widow of Du Plessis-Mornay comes unimpeached through the ordeal of mistrust. As for d'Aubigné, his reputation would alone be saved by the torrent of contradiction, to use a mild word, which has fallen upon him from the early days of his lifetime until now. But his statements are easily to be verified and his maligners confounded. Nevertheless, he was a Huguenot, or, at least, a Protestant —the terms are not exactly synonymous, though closely allied—and that was, and always has been, sufficient in France. The third volume of his "*Histoire Universelle,*" an admirable work, had the distinguished honour (and advertisement !) of being publicly burnt by the hangman by order of the Parliament of Paris, while he, disgusted with the then government, retired to Geneva where he spent the last years of his life in peace, surrounded by friends and brother exiles of his own Faith. Yet it is strange to reflect that his granddaughter, Madame de Maintenon, should have become, principally through self-interest, the most bitter persecutor of the Protestants and have driven many of the best subjects of France to England, Germany, Switzerland, America and other lands, in all of which their descendants have become welcome and honoured subjects ; and that she should, when she herself went

to her grave, have been spoken of more often than not as the "Curse of France."*

One final word must be given in this chapter to the Satirists who played a strong part in these last years of Henri's reign, and a useful one in enabling us to place ourselves amidst the brilliant surroundings of the period. Of all satires, that named *Satyre Ménippée*, which appeared at intervals (in two parts) a little earlier than what may be termed "Henri's last years," namely, between 1590 and 1600, was the most effective, since it turned an amount of ridicule and contempt upon The League—the most powerful combination of the Church and the Catholic nobility against which Henri had to contend—the Roman Catholics, the States-General, and the family of de Guise and de Mayenne, the chiefs of The League. The writers were numerous, and, although there were no professional authors in those days, namely, men who made a regular living by their pen, the satire burnt like vitriol, and did, as satire should,

> ". . . . . like a polish'd razor keen,
> Wound with'a touch that's scarcely felt or seen."

It achieved its purpose. The Duc de Mayenne stood forth more as a fat, blundering idiot than the ill-tempered, blustering autocrat he was; the men of the de Guise family more as frowning, scowling bullies

* See St. Simon's remarks on her in his celebrated *Mémoires*.

than nobles whose pride was almost meritorious when their high birth was remembered. Malice did its worst for one side, and, in doing so, performed the best office for the other.*

It may be that the service done to Henri's cause by this remarkable work led the King to be particularly lenient to many libels perpetrated on him. *La liberté d'imprimer* was, in the reign of Henri, complete—though in that of his son and grandson the reverse took place—and the *Discours*, "*Avis*," "*Avertissements-Livrets*," and other pamphlets which L'Estoile so frequently bought, teemed with attacks on Henri and his Court. One, the name of which will not bear mention here, attacked so ferociously the noblemen and noblewomen of the day for the lives they led, that, when he was pressed to punish the writer, Henri called for the book and read it himself. It did not spare him or his light existence, yet, while acknowledging that it was somewhat too plain-spoken—it was, indeed!—he refused to have the author punished and said that "he could not conscientiously proceed against an honest man for having told the truth." Another brochure, entitled *Le Soldat François*, abused de Villeroy, but Henri laughed at the latter's complaints and

* Butler is thought to have taken his idea of "Hudibras" from this satire.

practically told him to hold his tongue and swallow what was said about him.

At the Hôtel de Bourgogne the buffoons produced a play taxing Henri with avarice and the great Jewish financiers with ruining the country. The latter had the mountebanks put in prison and the King ordered them to be released.*

Such, in a few brief pages, is a rapid survey which might well have occupied a large volume had space permitted, of the most popular monarch who ever met his death at the hands of an assassin, and of the city—as it was in his time—wherein the assassination took place. But before that crime is recounted there are other persons to be described who were the nearest to Henri IV. in either affection or enmity; and to the one who shared his throne and was the mother of his children, even though she never possessed the love that should have been hers alone, it is now fitting to turn.

* L'Estoile's supplements to his *Registres journaux;* and the *Mercure François.*

Note.—In the foregoing description of Paris and its inhabitants during Henri's reign, I have followed principally L'Estoile; Bassompierre; Henri Sauval; Germain Brice; Dom Félibien; Lebeuf; L. S. Mercier; *Journal de Henri IV.* (L'Estoile); Sorel; Dreux de Radier; Dulaure, and many others. Pierre de L'Estoile kept a diary with as much regularity as he rose from his bed or went to it, and he is undoubtedly the best diarist of the reigns of Henri and his predecessor. Bassompierre was of the highest family, a soldier and a statesman, and, under Louis XIII., a field-marshal. He was considered to be the handsomest man of his time in France. He had ample opportunity to compile his memoirs during the twelve years he spent in the Bastille, to which Richelieu, in his jealousy, consigned him.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEEN AND HER SURROUNDINGS

MARIE DE MÉDICI, second wife of Henri IV., was the daughter of Francis II. de Médici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. This man possessed almost every fault which can be found in the worst characters of the Latin races, and especially in those whose families have risen from a somewhat humble origin to a position of rank and power. He had succeeded, a year after the birth of Marie, to his father's throne, and from that time gave the rein to his passions, which were those of cruelty, violence, vanity and egotism, while his best qualities, namely, cultivation and refinement of taste in all things artistic, were mostly kept in the background altogether. His unfortunate wife, Jeanne of Austria, a granddaughter of the Emperor (then styled Emperor of Germany) died from his continual brutality and persecution, and no sooner did this occur than he espoused the famous, and also infamous, Bianca di Capello, with whom he had for some time maintained a connection

Marie de Médici.

[*Facing p.* 80

which had long been the scandal of all civilized Europe. A few years later a fever removed him from the world and, some hours after, Bianca di Capello was also gone, while the suddenness and unanimity of these deaths gave rise to a suspicion which was probably little removed from the truth, namely, that both had been poisoned by the Grand Duke's most mortal enemies—his own subjects.

To Marie this visitation, or tragedy, whichever it might be, was really a boon. Her father was succeeded by her uncle, Ferdinand de Médici, who, at the time of his accession to the throne and to the possession of the enormous wealth of the family, was a Cardinal-Deacon of the Holy Roman Church. This position was, however, at once resigned, and the ruling power of Tuscany assumed by the new Grand Duke who married shortly afterwards the Princess Christine of Lorraine. She was but sixteen years old and exactly the same age as Marie.

Ferdinand was a man of a very different type from his elder brother, he being a jocund and pleasant person, fond of pomp, ceremony and good cheer, and fond, too, of his young niece; the affection for her being shared by his equally young wife. Consequently, he lent himself in every way in his power to furthering the chances of Marie's future. He caused her to be

well educated and, recognizing that she was now one of the most brilliant matches in Europe, set about discovering what prince there was to whom she could be most fitly allied. The investigations were, however, long and varied, owing to different causes. The catalogue is not uninteresting.

Before his own marriage to the Princess Christine Ferdinand had thought of the son of the Duke of Ferrara as a suitable husband for Marie, but more than one government, especially that of Spain, disapproved of the match since Ferrara was opposed to Spanish interests in Italy. As a set-off to this interference, the King of Spain suggested Farnese, Prince of Parma, who was an ally of his own ; but the Prince, having other matrimonial views, declined the suggestion. A little later, again under the influence of Spain, the Duke of Braganza was proposed, but a Portuguese alliance seemed at the moment unlikely to promise much, and Ferdinand was, on this occasion, the one to refuse. The Grand Duchess of Tuscany now suggested a candidate in a member of her own family, namely, the Prince de Vaudemont, but this time it was Marie's turn to object to the match though, unless she did not consider an alliance with the House of Lorraine of sufficient importance, it is difficult to know wherein lay the objection.

Ferdinand was not, however, to be baulked, and the last of these suggestions having been refused by the person most concerned, he now brought forward one that was, up to this period, the most important of all. Marie was offered, with a tremendous *dot*, to the heir to the throne of Austria, but, after innumerable negotiations, nothing came of it. Meanwhile, the King of Spain was still pressing the claims of the Duke of Braganza, but since this prince was not at the time a reigning one Ferdinand refused to entertain the idea, and at this moment there occurred the most extraordinary, as well as superb, offer yet made from any suitor. The Emperor proposed himself as husband provided Marie brought with her six hundred thousand gold crowns, or, failing this, he again suggested his heir on the understanding that he received four hundred thousand gold crowns. Marie, however, had no taste for either of the illustrious suitors, and Ferdinand, suspecting at the same time that the Emperor was only making these suggestions with a view to preventing the Princess from marrying anyone else, broke off all negotiations in that quarter.

The hour was, however, at hand for Marie to find a husband at last. It was time she should do so, since she was by now approaching her twenty-seventh year, and twenty-seven is late for a princess to be married,

while at that period it was considered even later than it is now. She was, however, well fitted to become a bride, being fair, tall, well-favoured, and the possessor of excellent health.

Charles IX. of France had died owing the de Médicis, who never ceased their banking transactions or any other of their commercial pursuits, over forty-five thousand ducats (the obligation having been considerably larger at the beginning of the loan); Henri III. had either not wanted money or had not been able to obtain it;* but Henri IV., who never possessed any money at all until he became King of France, had been forced to borrow heavily to carry on his attempts to secure the throne,† and he was still endeavouring to borrow more, while Ferdinand was continually complaining of the non-payment of the debts already incurred. It was from this state of affairs that an astute Churchman, the Cardinal Gondi, whom Henri employed to negotiate a farther loan from Ferdinand, saw his way to cancel not only the debt of the former

* Probably the latter, since at the end of his reign he had a difficulty in paying his servants and purveyors.

† De Sancy narrates in his memoirs that it took five troops of cavalry and two hundred infantry soldiers to escort from Florence to Paris the seventeen waggons containing one of Ferdinand's loans to Henri. The sum borrowed was a hundred thousand ordinary crowns, equal in those days to about sixty thousand pounds of our money in the present day.

but to place the niece of the latter on the throne of France. He informed the King that, to see his niece become Queen of the most powerful country in Europe after England, Ferdinand would be willing to part with a dowry of one hundred thousand gold crowns (an enormous sum), and Henri was enchanted with the suggestion. Gabrielle d'Estrées was dead and Henriette d'Entragues had taken her place and, at this time, held in her possession a written promise from her lover that she should become his Queen. But a sheet of paper with a promise of marriage scrawled on it was a poor opponent of what was a stupendous sum of money, and Ferdinand being delighted with the great prospects now looming before the House of the de Médicis negotiations on the subject at once took place. These negotiations were long and tiresome; too long to be more than mentioned in a work of these dimensions, but they were at last brought to a satisfactory termination. The King did not get the amount spoken of by Gondi, but what he did receive was a sum of eighty thousand gold crowns, of which sixty thousand were carried with Marie to France, while the whole of the debts of that country, from the time of Charles IX. to the day of the marriage, were cancelled. The young Grand-Duchess, who accompanied Marie to Marseilles and

was in charge of the specie, handed it over there and was careful to take a receipt for it.

The dowry was the largest any Queen of France had ever yet brought to her husband.

That Marie should have attained to the dignity of Queen of France would have been impossible had it not been for the fact that Henri required two things, namely, an heir to the throne he had won with so much difficulty, and a considerable amount of money to replenish the impoverished resources of his country, and that in her was alone to be found the person who could undoubtedly supply the second want and was young enough to satisfy the first. From Marie not only the money, but the successor was forthcoming. A son who afterwards became Louis XIII. was born, and the five other children followed regularly.

There were, however, many obstacles to be surmounted ere the daughter of the late Grand Duke had any chance of becoming the wife of Henri. One, it is true, was already overcome, namely, the existence of Gabrielle d'Estrées (of whose death an account will be given later), since it is undoubted that, had she not died, Henri would have married her if he could have obtained the consent of Marguerite de Valois (and that of the Pope, which was, however, certain) to a divorce. Another obstruction, almost equally as great,

was the contempt in which the King held the comparatively modern position of the de Médicis, and, above all, the hatred in which he held the memory of Catherine de Médici. That the latter feeling should exist was not extraordinary. Catherine had never liked the politically-arranged marriage which had taken place between Henri and her daughter Marguerite—Henri being at the moment a Protestant. She had prevented him from leaving Paris when he was warned to do so before the outbreak of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and had, instead, made him a prisoner in the Louvre, and afterwards in the Château de Vincennes. Moreover, Henri had very good reasons for supposing that his mother, who preceded him to Paris to be present at his wedding with Marguerite and died there with great suddenness, had been murdered through wearing a poisoned pair of gloves which the Queen-Mother was supposed to have had prepared for the purpose. The family of his second wife would be, therefore, as obnoxious to the King as that of the first had been, since they were almost identical ; and as it had obtained the reputation of being the most prolific race of murderers and poisoners that Europe had ever produced, not even excepting the Borgias, it was not possible that he should look forward with much pleasure to being again united to the de Médicis by marriage.

There was, however, always in his mind the other fact which was so repugnant to him. Himself the son of Antoine de Bourbon and the direct descendant, on one side, of the first Bourbon, and heir of the ancient Kings of Navarre on the other—he succeeding to that throne through his mother*—as well as being now the undisputed King of France, he had but a very poor opinion of the social position of the family of Florentine traders from whom his second wife, that was to be, was sprung. He could not forget that these traders were the least important of all Christian rulers bearing the rank of Prince, nor that, not more than eighty years before, they would have had to stand bareheaded before any person who bore the title of one.

On the other hand, money was wanted badly. He put, therefore, his animosity against the family, and also his contempt for it, in the background, and as on the death of Gabrielle Marguerite de Valois had

* Daughter and sole heiress of Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre, and of Marguerite, sister of Francis I., of France. She was called in her early days *La Mignonne des Rois*, because her father and her uncle, Francis, strove to show which could cherish her the most. Her father extorted a vow from her that she should always force herself to sing on giving birth to a child so that he or she should become valiant and powerful. She took the vow and kept it, and, in the case of Henri IV., it was justified. She was the principal hope and support of the Protestants until her death in 1572, aged forty-four. She had previously been married, as a child, to William, third Duke of Cleves, but the marriage was never consummated and was dissolved by Pope Paul III.

agreed to a divorce to which she would never consent while that person, whom she termed *sale et vilaine*, continued to exist, the contract of marriage between Henri and Marie was signed in the Pitti Palace in Florence on the 25th of April, 1600, the witnesses being the Archbishop of Pisa, the Duca di Bracciano, and the French Ambassador. Five months later the Duc de Bellegarde publicly espoused the Princess on behalf of the King, and the Cardinal Aldobrandini, representing the Pope, bestowed the nuptial benediction on the union.

Although Marie had been well educated she did not know a word of French on coming to France; but when her marriage with Henri was at last arranged it was thought well for her to make an attempt to acquire the language. She was, consequently, given some French books and a dictionary to study, and the volume she selected was entitled, *Clorinde, ou l'amante tuée par son amant*, probably because the title was not unlike what it would be in Italian, or because it suggested the style of book which young Italian ladies were in the habit of freely poring over at the period. Marie, however, never to the last became proficient in French, but spoke a mixture of that language and Italian, while she never wrote in the former if there was the slightest hope that her correspondent could understand the

latter. It is a strange coincidence that neither the King nor the Queen spoke perfectly the tongue of the country on whose throne they sat, though the same thing has been known to occur in other lands and at other times.*.

There are numerous descriptions still in existence of the triumphant manner in which the new Queen progressed from Florence to Paris, partly by sea across the Mediterranean and then by land.† To these is also added a description of the suite that accompanied her. Amongst it were two people destined to exercise a terrible influence over the young Queen and a fatal one over France, and to meet at last with ends as awful as any that have ever overwhelmed human beings. The first and, as regards Marie, the most important of the two, was Leonora Galigaï, who travelled in the Queen's suite, partly as companion and partly as maid of honour. The second was a subtle, well-favoured Florentine, named Concino Concini, who also accompanied the Royal *cortège* in the capacity of secretary or gentleman-in-waiting. Both were humbly born, Leonora being the daughter of a locksmith, and Concini the son of a

* Matthieu, who had seen her often, narrates Marie's ignorance of French in his *Histoire de France*, latest editions.

† She was borne from Marseilles in a litter drawn, until she reached Paris, by Italian footmen. Henri put an end to this cruel practice and substituted mules for the human beasts of burden. (Matthieu.)

notary; yet at his death he had become the Marquis d'Ancre and a Marshal of France, and she, who early became his wife, naturally shared his honours and was generally spoken of as Madame La Maréchale. Concini was strikingly handsome, Leonora was repulsively ugly, or, as she has been described, hideous.* Yet hers was the brain that dominated the heights of their temporary fortune and, on being tried for her life previously to being put to death for sorcery, it was she who, on being asked to state what was her influence over the Queen, is reported to have first uttered the oft-quoted remark: "Nothing beyond the power of a strong mind over a weak one."†

From the first arrival in Paris of these people in the suite of the Queen, Henri mistrusted them, as it would

* It is, however, difficult to accept the description of Leonora given by a contemporary historical writer, and edited by Edouard Tricotel, in his *Variétés Biographiques*. He says of her: "She was *blonde* like a *jay*, she had the locks of Medusa; her head shone like *pumice-stone* (!); her eyes were *green* like *fire*, she had the nose of an *elephant*, teeth long and pointed, the hands of a harpy, the feet of a *lobster*, body spotted like a buffalo and a mouth small like the opening of an oven." Tricotel is regarded as a serious collector, but his seriousness scarcely appears here! It should also be stated that many Italian writers credit both Leonora and her husband with birth superior to that which is generally assigned to them. (The italics are the author's.)

† It is doubtful if she used the expression. The Abbé de Livry (an Italian named de Lizza), who was always in her company, in giving evidence against her at her trial, stated that "La Maréchale possessed a mind which exercised great power over feeble ones," and this remark probably led to Leonora being credited with the above phrase. Tallemant des Réaux is the only person who attributes it to her, and even he states that he doubts whether she ever uttered it.

seem he mistrusted most Florentines, and, as it afterwards turned out, with great reason.* He saw at once that the humbly-born *dame de compagnie* had a strange influence over her mistress, and he discerned that she was early beginning to set the Queen against the lady who had now replaced Gabrielle in his wandering heart, namely, Henriette d'Entragues. He also recognized that this was not a task difficult of attainment. Independently of any natural jealousy which a newly-married woman, or, indeed, any woman who was a wife, might feel at the surroundings amidst which she found herself, the Queen was of a somewhat dull and heavy disposition; she was also very severe on what the French termed lightly, "*le chapitre de la galanterie*," and her moroseness was not likely to be much brightened by all the intrigues going on around her, headed by her own volatile husband. In sober truth, whatever love affairs might have come to her notice in Florence during her maidenhood must have sunk into almost insignificance beside all that surrounded her in the Court of the first of the Bourbon Kings. Maids-of-honour who forgot

* On the arrival in Paris of Don Jean de Médici (a natural uncle of the Queen), Henri asked him how he could get rid of these persons, and Don Jean suggested bluntly that he should have them assassinated, that being the shortest way. Henri considered this summary method and talked it over with Sully but afterwards discarded the idea on the ground that all the vindictive Italians in Paris would be added to the number of other murderers awaiting the opportunity to slay him.

themselves were, therefore, under her rule, dismissed in a manner that for a long time, if not for ever, prevented them from showing their faces amidst their own society again; in many cases courtiers who had paid these young ladies too much attention stood in very great danger of losing their heads, and, had it not been for the King, who, in such cases as these, was not inclined to be too severe, they would probably have done so.

It was the business of "La Galigaï," as she was then termed, to foment such matters, to throw out hints against every woman at Court who was placed too high for her taste or was likely to be so eventually, and to clear the way as much as was possible for her own advancement. Here again, however, Henri stood in her path, since it was sufficient for Leonora to make a suggestion to cause him to veto it. Yet even he, the man whom any handsome woman could twist round her finger, was at last, by the wiles and artifices of the woman who was undoubtedly the most ill-favoured of all at Court, induced to consent to almost everything she desired.

In spite of the wealth which Marie de Médici brought to her husband, and the fact that she provided him with an heir to the throne as well as other children, her life was far from a happy one, owing principally to

that husband's admiration for other women, an admiration that has been described, and, in all likelihood, truthfully so, as nothing short of a mania. She is reported to have said often that his infatuation for Henriette d'Entragues had poisoned the whole of her existence since she came into France, but she might well have coupled the names of many other ladies with that of the principal favourite. The legitimate pangs which the wife suffered at the hands of the mistress were, however, shared by the mistress, not only at the hands of the wife, but of rivals. Nor could the brusque good-humour of Henri appease either Marie or Henriette ; so that, in his turn, he, too, enjoyed but little peace in his house, especially as, with a surprising lack of delicacy, or even decency, he eventually installed Henriette under the same roof—that of the Louvre—which sheltered him and the Queen. It is stated by Sully that the scenes between the King and her were interminable, and that never more than eight days passed without a violent one, while once the latter was aroused to such fury that she rushed at Henri with her hand raised to strike him, and was only prevented from doing so by Sully himself. Always rough, the latter seized the arm of the Queen so violently (while exclaiming that Henri had the power to execute her within half an hour) that she cried out in pain, and,

holding her arm, would say nothing more than : " You have lifted your hand to me. You have lifted your hand to me."

Henri's partisans have, however, invariably taken the line that he would have been a better husband had Marie been a more congenial wife, and it is certain that, whatever the latter's wrongs may have been, she talked about them far too much and far too openly. The Court was kept in a continual state of excitement as to what scenes might occur next, or what woman of rank—and beauty—would be the next to be flouted by the indignant wife. Since it was the self-appointed function of Leonora to pour into the ears of her mistress not only the story of the King's actual infidelities but also stories of infidelities that had never occurred, it is not surprising that the courtiers had enough gossip to keep them interested.

Short of his particular failings in the one respect, added to his love of gambling, Henri was an agreeable husband, a man of a light, pleasant nature and, in spite of the roughness of his early life and training, a very perfect gentleman—*un vrai roi*. He was also very considerate for the Queen's dignity and for her future, which, he never failed to assert, would long outstretch his own. He always spoke to her as one who was absolutely certain to outlive him, and the counsel he gave

her as to how she should arrange her existence and that of their children was excellent and far-seeing. He also warned her to have more command over her temper and disposition, and was wont to tell her that "the end of his life would be the beginning of her troubles," and that, if she and the Dauphin—whose nature, he observed, was obstinate, harsh and cold—did not control themselves, the crown to which he had succeeded by right and might would probably slip through their hands. In the Queen's case his forecast came true; in that of his son it would also have been realized had it not suited Richelieu—as yet an unrisen star—to support him for his own ends.

Nothing could, however, alter the Queen's disposition or subdue her justifiable hatred of Henriette d'Entragues, and the scenes between the two rivals were always very forcible. Indeed, the once amiable, if always heavy, character of Marie seems to have become thoroughly soured against all who should have been dear to her. It has frequently been narrated that—so embittered was she at last—for four years she refused to kiss the future King Louis. Later on, she subjected him to occasional chastisement, though afterwards she would bow reverently before him and address him as "Sire," and "Your Majesty," salutations which drew from the youthful monarch the remark that he would

prefer less studied courtesy of greeting and more regard for his bodily feelings.*

Had Henri not been the offender in all the domestic embroilments, it would be permissible to say that he bore the various scenes which occurred with extreme good humour; but, as he could easily have prevented them by altering his own conduct, to him must be attributed the blame of their frequency. He had, indeed, some justice on his side when he stated that, so long as Marie continued to countenance the Concinis and several other foreigners about the Court, he could not regard her as either a loving or a dutiful wife. Yet, on Sully suggesting one of those short measures he was prone to adopt in critical cases, namely, to send

* Besides Henri's children by Marie de Médici, Gabrielle, and Henriette, he left by Jacqueline du Breuil, whom he created Comtesse de Moret, Antoine de Bourbon, Comte de Moret, who was killed at twenty-five years of age at the battle of Castelnaudary. By Charlotte des Essarts, Comtesse de Romorentin, he left Jeanne, who became Abbess of Fontevrault, and Henriette, who became Abbess of Chelles. All his children—those of Marie and of the other ladies—were treated well and kindly by him and mixed together more or less on the same footing; none was allowed to address him as "Sire," but always as "Father." Of those who chiefly incurred his displeasure, the Dauphin was reproved and punished the most, his sour, ungracious nature and his love of cruelty causing Henri more pain than he ever suffered through the others. Twice he felt obliged to administer personal chastisement to this prince, once for begging him to have a nobleman whom he did not like beheaded, and once for having beaten in the head of a wounded sparrow with a large stone. He also felt impelled to write to Madame de Montglat, the governess of the royal children, to tell her that she must be more severe with the Dauphin and that she must whip him well when he misbehaved, and do so in such a manner that he should appreciate the correction.

all the Italians back across the mountains, exile others, and chase the whole family of the d'Entragues out of France, Henri simply said that he would ask for nothing better but did not see how it could be done. It would, nevertheless, appear that, so far as the Florentine hangers-on were concerned, it might easily have been done, since at this very time the Grand Duke was writing to his niece and telling her that she was laying up a rod for her own back by the manner in which she allowed such a creature as Leonora Galigaï to influence her.

The affray in which the Queen attempted to strike the King seems, however, to have strung him up to desperation. He announced that he would not tolerate "this woman" (the Queen) any longer, and that, 'bag and baggage,' she should be sent back to her own country. But Sully, who cared nothing for Marie, and had more than once been treated by her as though he were no better than an upper-servant,* again poured oil on the troubled waters by reminding him of the children and their future. Richelieu, whose pen was

* Sully appears to have been unfortunate in his intercourse with the various ladies connected with Henri IV. Gabrielle d'Estrées spoke of him as a "menial," and Henriette d'Entragues treated him as though he were one. Each had some reason for doing so. He was Gabrielle's most bitter opponent, while he tore up the first promise of marriage that Henri gave Henriette—a document of which Henri instantly wrote out a duplicate.

as mordant as his disposition, has a good deal to say on these matters in his memoirs, while, as regards Henri's idea of getting rid of Marie, he utters the philosophical remark that "Rage often makes us say things that nothing in the world would cause us to perform."

After these instances of the far from connubial state in which the royal couple lived, it may come as a surprise to many—though not, perhaps, to those who are well acquainted with the world and the workings of human nature—when they learn that, in the depths of their hearts, Henri and his wife had a considerable affection for each other. The truth is that Marie was proud of her husband and his great position, and of the manner in which he had won it, while, being herself a pure woman who had never cared for any other man, the whole strength of a nature willing to love and desiring to be loved went out to the hero whose wife she had become before she ever saw him. Also, the strongest link that can bind man to woman had been forged between them—he was the father of her children. On the other hand, Henri possessed a remarkable nature. He loved such home-comforts as a King ever has the opportunity of enjoying—he, too, was not forgetful that his hearth could only be shared by the woman he had married, by her with whom his interests

were most identical: the woman who had given him the children who also shared that home and played about his knees. Yet, caring for her in this manner, there was in his being the strange, insatiable desire for the possession of other women's love, mingled with the impossibility of his being true to any one of them, as well as his admiration for all forms of female beauty, though it has been said that not one of his favourites was ever actually beautiful. To which weakness must be added his delight in their wit and mirth—though they all teased him, abused him, and spoke insultingly of each of his wives by turn—and his pleasure in always having some illicit intrigue on hand. In truth, he was a man well fitted, on one side, for the calm enjoyments of domesticity, yet with, on the other, so strange a fibre in his nature that delirious joys in which no spark of domesticity could find a place were the sweetest morsels of his tempestuous life. Henriette d'Entragues once exclaimed that, when all was said and done, she was nothing but the King's plaything (though "plaything" was not the word she used), and, in saying so, she spoke truly.

With these feelings in each of their hearts—and if, at the same time, it had pleased Heaven to remove Henriette d'Entragues from the earth—there might have been almost a prospect of something like domestic bliss

between Henri and Marie. Yet there was still in existence, and always would be, a vast obstacle outside Henri's successive amours which renders necessary the word "almost." That obstacle was created by the children of Henri, who were not also those of Marie, yet all of whom the former was determined to have treated like the others. Some of them were legitimatized, and all were educated in the same manner as the Dauphin and his brothers and sisters. Indeed, the Duc de Vendôme, eldest son of Henri and Gabrielle, bore an almost royal appellation when he was termed "César-Monsieur," instead of the absolutely royal title of "Monsieur," which from early days was always that of the King's, or future King's, nearest brother. Bassompierre, in those memoirs for the composition of which he, unhappily, found so much time, extends himself very considerably on this subject, and relates many interesting matters in connection with it. He dilates on the hateful character of the Duke, while mentioning what may be considered as an extraordinary fact, namely, that while the children of Gabrielle—who was, except where Sully was concerned, an even-tempered, amiable creature—were all of a detestable character, those of Henriette—who was bitter, vindictive and quarrelsome—were easy and pleasant to live with. He tells us, also, as do

countless others, of the grief with which Marie regarded the close contact of her children with those of the mistresses; of how she long resisted writing to them as "their mother," and of how it was not until after the death of Henri that she would speak of "her nephew," de Vendôme, or "her niece," de Verneuil.

Meanwhile, Marie was an absolute tool in the hands of her *dame de compagnie*. The illegitimate brother of the late King (Henri III.), who was Archbishop of Rouen, dying when Marie had become Queen Regent, one of that ecclesiastic's offices, the Abbey of Marmoutier, was given to the brother of her favourite, Leonora. Before, however, that person could take possession of the great benefice it was necessary that he, who was an ignorant man, should acquire the simple arts of reading and writing—an achievement which he never succeeded in accomplishing. Nevertheless, he was afterwards promoted to the Archbishopric of Tours. A little later, Concini was himself presented with the Governorship of Bourg-en-Bresse, in addition to numerous other offices he possessed. It was, however, discovered that the position was not vacant at the moment, since the actual governor was, though ill, not dead; and Marie acceded with a very bad grace to that nobleman's refusal to resign his post for the benefit of the favourite's husband.

As, however, these adventurers played no particular part, so far as is absolutely known, in the terrible tragedy to which is owing the inception of this book, neither would have been introduced into it were it not for the desire of showing of what a weak and plastic nature the Queen was, and of how, in after years, the people were willing to believe that she was not totally ignorant of the Court plot that was aimed against the King's life and would undoubtedly have succeeded had it not been anticipated from another quarter. It may, nevertheless, be said that, in spite of all suspicions which existed on this subject in the minds of her contemporaries, and which have been shared by many persons, especially historians of later days, there is not the slightest proof that Marie even knew that the assassination of the King was seriously contemplated by those who surrounded him at the time it took place. The statement of the Duc de Vendôme was probably regarded by her as the idle prattle of a boy of sixteen; while her husband had lived so long a charmed life, and had so fortunately evaded the ill-constructed, and worse enacted, plots to slay him, that she had doubtless been soothed into indifference. Consequently, when she besought him not to quit the Louvre on the day when his murder did at last take place, she was, in all likelihood, making a request which she had never made before

and only made at this time in consequence of Henri's own indecision.

It has, however, been brought against her that her importunities to Henri to allow her to be consecrated Queen—which event, on his at last consenting, took place at St. Denis on the day before the murder—disclose, or, at least, hint strongly at, the fact that she knew his doom was close at hand, and was, therefore, desirous of making herself secure—before the fatal event should happen—of the Regency of the Kingdom and the control of the infant son who would then be King. But this is an unsound argument. At the time of Henri's death, Marie de Médici had been his wife for ten years, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that, during those years, she had frequently put forward her undoubted right to receive the final and most important of all ceremonies connected with her royalty. Indeed, it is well known that she had often asserted her claim to this which was her due and, on refusal upon the score of expense by her husband—who never counted the cost where his own pleasures and self-indulgences were concerned!—had borne her disappointment with bitter resignation. But, at this time, there was an added reason for the desire—quite outside any fear, or even knowledge, that the King's death was close at hand. He was, on the day after that death

actually occurred, to have set out on the campaign against Spain and Austria, and to have taken the lead in the most important warfare in which he would have been concerned since he crushed The League at Ivry and obtained at last the undisputed possession of the throne of France. Should he, therefore, have fallen in that campaign, and Marie still have been an uncrowned Queen, it is undoubted that the *États-généraux* would not, and, perhaps, could not, have conferred the Regency on her; the boy-king, Louis, would not have been placed in her hands during his minority, and she would have been but a colourless figure of royalty in France from the moment of her husband's death.

Finally, as regards her innocence of any complicity in whatever schemes were in existence against the King, it has to be remembered that, with his death, Marie de Médici lost far more than she could ever again possess, the position of a Queen-Consort being infinitely higher and more important than that of a Queen-Regent, while, since she was not the woman to allow herself to form any sentimental attachment for another man, even had she been inwardly prompted to do so, there ceased with Henri's life the slight experience of domesticity and companionship that had ever been enjoyed by her.

The position of Queen-Regent never became an agreeable one to Marie. From the first she recognized how much she was a cipher in the hands of the arrogant and turbulent nobility who surrounded her, and also in those of the intriguing Leonora Galigaï. The ruffianly Duc d'Épernon tyrannized over her, though, later, he assisted her to escape from the Château de Blois, to which her son had consigned her. Concini, the Italian adventurer, who had now risen to high rank and wealth and was first Minister, browbeat her while, at the same time, he did not scruple to forge his wife's name to any drafts for money from Marie that he might require. Richelieu—who owed his first advance in life to Leonora, who, in the height of her power, selected him for the office of Grand, or High, Almoner—thwarted her, and de Luynes, who, later, planned and carried out the murder of Concini with the full knowledge of Louis XIII., and then succeeded to all his offices and many of his properties, ignored her orders.

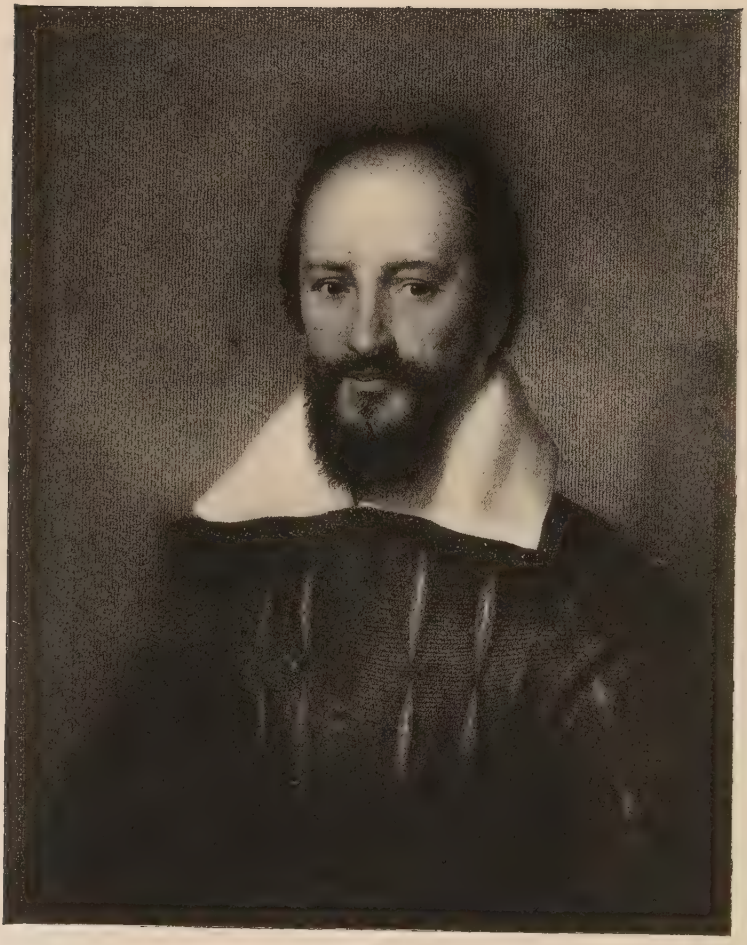
It was some time after Henri's death that Marie began to have considerable doubts of what her future position might be in France, and, at this time, also, that she began to put by as much wealth as possible, with a view to providing for that future, should she be forced to fly the country. Jewels of all description were bought by her, diamonds being the principal

purchases; money was changed into drafts on bankers in various cities of Italy, Holland, and other countries, and investments were made almost daily—anywhere out of France. Yet, as events proved, hardly one crown-piece and no jewels, except those she had with her at Blois and carried away with her when she escaped from the castle, ever benefited her. The Italian investments were, by the order of France, never repaid to her, nor, on the other hand, were they until long afterwards handed over to France itself, since the governments of the various Italian States claimed that they had been sent through the hands of Leonora, among whose relatives the sums of money would eventually be distributed as her property. This, some usually well-informed authors state, eventually occurred, though little proof, if any, is furnished on the matter.

Fleeing ultimately to Cologne, her health seriously impaired, her money gone, or, at least, unattainable, she died on a bed of straw in what has been described by numerous writers as "a mere garret," attended only by two faithful maidservants. The house in which this garret was situated was one inherited by Rubens from his father; Rubens, whom she had once invited to Paris as her guest to decorate the Luxembourg and paint the allegorical subjects on its ceilings, and whom she was then enabled to load with the highest

honours and vast sums of money! She! who had once been the richest heiress in Europe; she, who had sat on the throne of France as the wife of the great King, and was, at her death, the mother of the then King—a cold-blooded, heartless creature who allowed her to perish thus in want and obscurity!

Authorities:—L'Estoile, *Journal.* Fontenay-Mareuil, *Mémoires.* De Morgues, *Les deux faces de la vie et de la mort de Marie de Médicis.* Duc de St. Simon, *Parallèle des trois premiers Bourbons* —a mine of historical wealth, though written by the aristocratic and scathing author more than a hundred years after the first Bourbon came to the throne. Sully, *Œconomies Royales.* Halphen, *Lettres inédites du roi Henri IV.* Buonarroti, *Descrizione delle felicissime nozze di Madama Maria Médici.* Richelieu, *Mémoires. Mémoires* du Duc de Bellegarde. La Serre. Loiseleur, *L'Évasion d'une reine,* 1873. Batifol, L., *La Vie intime d'une Reine de France.* Paris, N. D. *Recueil de Lettres de S. A. R. Catherine de Bourbon, sœur de Henri IV.,* Bibliothèque Nationale (Unpublished). B. Zeller, *Henri IV. et Marie de Médicis,* etc., etc.



SULLY.

[*Facing p.* 109

CHAPTER III

SULLY AND THE DEATH OF GABRIELLE D'ESTRÉES

MAXIMILIEN DE BÉTHUNE, Baron de Rosny, Duc de Sully, Marshal of France and the favourite Minister of Henri IV., was born on December 13th, 1560, at Rosny. He was descended from an ancient and honourable family which, by its connections, was second to none below royalty in France and, by its antiquity, was the equal of the royal houses of Valois and Bourbon. The name was distinguished as early as the Crusades, in which several of the de Béthunes took part, and, as time went on, alliances were formed with the princes of France, the Emperors of Constantinople, the Counts of Flanders, the Dukes of Lorraine, the Kings of England, Scotland, Castille and Jerusalem, the house of Austria and the family of Courtenai—which had once possessed the throne of Byzantium—and those of de Montmorency, de Châtillon, de Mélun and de Horn.*

* Sully claimed to be descended from the Beatons of Scotland, and sometimes arrogantly stated that this great family was descended

The Fate of Henry of Navarre

Born a Protestant, he early attracted the attention of the future King of Navarre and France, and, from that time, rose so rapidly that he soon obtained and held the position of the most prominent subject in the latter country, and, indeed, of the whole of Europe.

As a child of twelve, it was his fate to find himself in the middle of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and he owed his salvation to what was, probably, the first piece of that astute diplomacy which, in after years, he carried to such successful heights. Being a scholar at the *Collège de Bourgogne*, though not a resident in it, he was awakened at three o'clock in the morning by the ringing of the church-bells, the shrieks and cries of those being murdered, the reflection of flames from some of the houses that had been set on fire, and the discharge of muskets. As he was lodging in the house of a Protestant woman with whom he had been placed by his father, it at once occurred to him that this would be no safe shelter, especially as the air resounded with cries of "*Tue! Tue! aux Huguenots,*" "Guise," "Tavannes," etc., and, consequently, putting on his scholar's gown and carrying *ostensibly* under his arm a

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from his, the de Béthunes. It has been said of him that he had the "wild British" air and a "cold blue eye," which was also considered by many on the Continent as typical of our nation. Marbault remarked of him, though not in connection with his British appearance, "that he struck terror everywhere and that his look and his behaviour frightened everyone."

large Book of Hours such as the Roman Catholics used, he set out for the college. On the way, "wading through blood," he was three times stopped by the Garde de Corps of Charles IX., and on each occasion the possession of the sacred book beloved by those of the Faith to which he and his family were opposed, saved his life. At the college door the porter refused to let him in until the Book of Hours again served as his passport, and, even when he had obtained admission, he narrowly escaped being slain by two infuriated priests who were intoning the "Sicilian Vespers" hymn, and who cried out that they believed he was a Protestant and that they would slay even babes at the breast who were born of parents of that Faith. The Principal of the college was, however, a man of a different stamp, and, aided by the boy's possession of the book, was enabled to preserve his life.*

From the age of sixteen Sully accompanied Henri and was present with him in most of the campaigns that took place, the young man being then an infantry volunteer. At the celebrated battle of Ivry, he served as a cavalry officer and carried the standard of a relative who commanded a force he had raised. In this renowned and almost decisive affray Sully fought by the

* Sully, De Bury, Anquetil, Thomas. Histories of Henri IV.; de Thou, etc.

side of Henri, had two horses killed under him and received seven wounds, being afterwards left for dead on the field. His first intimation that The League was defeated was when he recovered his senses and observed four of the enemy by his side, who, on seeing that he was an officer of their conqueror's forces, instantly implored him not to have them made prisoners or to execute them.

He became from this time the constant companion of the King, fighting for him and always doing so by his side: advising him and showing his astuteness in almost every counsel he gave, although he was careful to invariably speak of Henri's own voice as his oracle. Henri, on his part, thoroughly recognized the cleverness of the astute, if shockingly brusque, man whom he had attracted to his fortunes, and, had it not been that Sully hated the two mistresses who, of all the number, had come so near to attaining the position of Queen, it is doubtful if an unpleasant word would have ever been exchanged between them. But this side of Henri's life—as well as the enormous expense it entailed on the public funds—was hateful to the Minister whose own domestic existence was blameless. He was twice married, and it is owing to the haughty and turbulent nature of his second wife that the terrible suspicion fell upon him that Gabrielle d'Estrées met her death with

his sanction, partly in punishment for her arrogant treatment of the future Duchesse de Sully and partly because of Sully's determination that a woman of the character of Gabrielle should never sit on the throne of France.

With regard to this personage, a remarkable and utterly unnecessary amount of foolish sentimentality has been attached to her name through numerous generations, while a sympathy has been accorded to her supposed romantic career which was not due to it, even at the time of that worse than ordinarily painful event, her death. Nor does there appear to have been, as yet, any inclination on the part of those who practise this sentimentality, or bestow this mawkish sympathy on Gabrielle, to make themselves acquainted with the true history of the unfortunate woman who had once almost attained the highest position that any of her sex can hold. It is well, therefore, to give in this chapter on Sully a sketch of her career and character—as far as the bounds of propriety will permit—which may possibly correct the misunderstanding under which many writers, and far more readers, outside France as well as in, have laboured long.

Gabrielle d'Estrées was the daughter of Jean Antoine d'Estrées, Marquis de Cœuvres, and of his wife Françoise Babou de la Bourdaisière, and was, as her father was

wont to exclaim in anything but a whisper, one of "*une pépinière des filles mal sages.*" Her mother undoubtedly contributed little towards helping her to become *bien sage*, since, at the age of sixteen, Gabrielle was, by the aid of the Duc d'Épernon, "sold" by her to Henri III. for the sum of six thousand crowns, of which two thousand were stolen by the nobleman (Montigny) who was sent to pay it to the Marquise de Cœuvres. Henry III. appears to have tired of her very soon and she to have become disgusted with the peculiar habits of the last of the Valois kings, whereupon her insatiable mother again handed her over to a rich Italian financier in Paris, named Zamet (in whose house she was once supposed, but erroneously so, to have died eventually), and, later on, again for a price, to the Cardinal de Guise, who treated her well for a year and then discarded her.

The affections of this once much-sympathized-with heroine were next transferred to the Duc de Longueville, and afterwards to the Duc de Bellegarde—the only man for whom Gabrielle ever felt a spark of love—if she ever felt one for any person—and he, in his desire to stand well in the favour of the King, sounded her praises so loudly that he discovered too late that, except for occasional secret meetings, he had lost her for ever.

Henri was at this time greatly smitten with the charms of Marie Claudine de Beauvilliers, who managed to combine with her affection for him the sacred office of Abbess of Montmartre, but resigned that position at his request. But whether the King's advancing years, or his great nose, or his pendulous lip failed to please Gabrielle when de Bellegarde took Henri to see her, or whether she was but playing a part such as a young woman, whose value in gold crowns had already been estimated more than once, would well know how to play, Gabrielle herself testified anything but interest in her latest admirer. If this coldness were really only acting, she could have chosen no *rôle* better calculated to bring the amorous King to her feet. The colder and the more indifferent she appeared to be—or as she may actually have been, since Henri possessed no manly beauty while the Duc de Bellegarde was in the prime of life and handsome, and, greater than all to Gabrielle, rich—the more Henri was inflamed. Forgetting the abbess at once, he endeavoured to see his new love daily; a desire difficult to gratify, since, at this time, Cœuvres was surrounded by the troops of The League (never finally subdued until 1593), and for him to have fallen into their hands would have meant the total failure of his cause, and, undoubtedly, the final ruin of his hopes of ever possessing the throne of France. Yet,

even the prospect of the loss of a second crown that must, on his conversion to Roman Catholicism, be added to that of the small one of Navarre which he already possessed, could not daunt him where a new passion was concerned. The story has been told so often, and by so many different pens—from that of Pèréfixe, Archbishop of Paris (1662–70), to that of Tallemant des Réaux—the French Horace Walpole of his time—of how Henri, determined to see Gabrielle, passed close by the garrisons of The League disguised as a reaper and with a bundle of straw on his bent back until he reached her, that it is impossible to doubt it.

At any rate, his foolhardiness attained no great success. Henri was still in a very doubtful position as regarded his future and was possessed of very little money, which was the thing that concerned Gabrielle most, while, since de Bellegarde could give her everything she required, she saw no reason for removing her affections from him.

It was, however, certain that Henri must triumph over his principal rival, but, in spite of the extravagance in which he continued to indulge on Gabrielle's account, he always found that de Bellegarde was lurking in the background. Meanwhile, it was necessary that Gabrielle should hold a more recognized position than that of an unmarried woman as the King was now resolved to

make her his wife, so great was his infatuation; and, consequently, a Monsieur de Liancourt was called upon to marry her and was rewarded with the title of Marquis de Monceaux for doing so, as well as with a fixed income for life. As had been arranged, the newly-wedded couple parted at the church door and never met again, and the divorce necessary to set Gabrielle free was soon pronounced. In this manner a custom was inaugurated in the House of Bourbon which continued until the end of the reign of Louis XV., nearly one hundred and eighty years afterwards, the last *maîtresse-en-titre* to comply with it being Madame du Barry.

Gabrielle was very soon, however, to cease to be the Marquise de Monceaux and become better known by the new title of Duchesse de Beaufort, which was conferred upon her by the King at the birth of the Duc de Vendôme. In this prominent position she considered it her duty to become a power in politics and, although all her efforts had but one end, namely, her own aggrandisement, she did, in an indirect way, bring about peace between The League—as represented by the Duke de Mayenne—and Henri; or, perhaps, it may be better said, to bring about the pardon of the Leaguers by the latter.

Henri was, however, by no means free as yet of the troubles of war, and it was at this time that, hearing

in the presence of Gabrielle of how the Spaniards had landed on the Norman coast and marched inland to attack Amiens, he uttered a remark which was, perhaps, the best and most self-respecting one he ever made in his life. "I have played the part of King of France long enough," he exclaimed; "it is now time for me to play that of the King of Navarre"—the exclamation having probably been called forth by a sudden recollection of the valiant struggle he had maintained as the latter, and the life of indulgence he had been leading of late as the former.

Meanwhile, Gabrielle was becoming more and more haughty and presumptuous and had, at last, assumed all the airs and graces of a woman who was about to become Queen of France, she undoubtedly being led to do so by the fact that, although Marguerite de Valois had sworn she would never consent to a divorce from Henri with a view to putting *cette créature* in her place, it was well known that the Pope was almost certain to pronounce the divorce with or without the consent of Marguerite. A direct heir to the throne was absolutely needed, and as the legitimation of the Duc de Vendôme had already taken place—this being the custom of the period in similar cases—a form of marriage between his mother and father was all that was necessary to constitute him heir apparent.

Nevertheless, there were doubts as to whether even the Pope with all his power—and he was undoubtedly the most important personage in Europe in a religious, legal and general sense—could grant a divorce without the consent of both the married parties which judges, jurisconsults, juries and the world in general would consent to regard as tenable. Moreover, the ancient nobility and grand seigneurs were up in arms, in a figurative sense, on the subject, and regarded the proposed marriage—even if Henri had been a single man—as an insult to their order. Consequently, they wrote as plainly as even the highest-born dared to write to the Pope to express their opinion on the matter, and His Holiness, while, as has been said, "almost certain to pronounce the divorce," still hesitated to do so.

Henri was therefore between cross-fires. His passion for Gabrielle knew no abatement but, at the same time, he had no desire to see the whole of his partly-gained country rise up against him. He had also to contend against the determination of Marguerite, should she continue to remain obdurate. There was, consequently, only one thing for him to do, namely, to endeavour in every way in his power to force the Pope, by attacks on those whom His Holiness particularly favoured, to decide in his favour and ignore the woman who was at present his wife. If that could be compassed

he felt himself sufficiently strong to face the anger of the nobility, and, as he had conquered them before, and was universally popular with the people, while the former were exactly the reverse owing to their insolence and oppression, he did not doubt that he could overmaster them again. Meanwhile, things remained at the pass to which they had already arrived. Gabrielle not only assumed the airs and demeanour of a future queen, but was, to a great extent, treated as a lady occupying that position. By this time, however, an unexpected solution of the matter was at hand and, had it not arisen within the next fifteen days, the woman who had been sold by her mother as cattle in the market-place are sold, who had bestowed her favours on more than one member of the nobility, and had been for some time the *maîtresse-en-titre* of the King, would have undoubtedly ascended the ancient throne of France as Queen.

Her sumptuous garments for the first ceremony—that of her marriage—were prepared, as were also the crimson velvet robes which none but the Queens of France might wear. The ring with which the monarchs of France espoused the land over which they were called to rule had already been removed by Henri from his finger and placed on hers as a sign of engagement; the deference with which a future consort of a monarch

was always treated was shown to her by all the courtiers. The Pope's consent was not yet given, but Henri knew that it soon would be.

Gabrielle was at this time, namely, little more than fifteen days before her marriage would take place, staying at Fontainebleau with the object of being near her future husband. She was, however, anxious to return to Paris since Easter was at hand, and to attend there, publicly, the usual religious ceremonies, or, as the French describe it, to "*faire ses Pâques*," as a good Catholic. The reason for this, in her case, somewhat ostentatious ceremony, was that she was desirous of publicly proving herself to possess religious opinions, a matter upon which very considerable doubts had of late been freely expressed. Arrived in Paris, she supped with Zamet, the Italian financier previously mentioned, and then went to lodge at the Deanery of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where her aunt, Madame de Sourdis, was also installed as a permanent guest of the Chancellor, an old man with whom the lady—who appears to have been of a type not very remote from that represented by Gabrielle's mother—was on extremely friendly terms. Madame de Sourdis was, however, absent in the country and, pending her return, which Gabrielle at once commanded, the latter had for attendants and companions Madame and Mademoiselle de Guise—the latter of

whom was the most aristocratic, as she was one of the most brilliant, authoresses of her day—and the Duchesse de Retz and her daughters. On the next morning the future Queen went to the Church of Le Petit Saint-Antoine there to hear *Les Ténèbres*—one of the sacred offices of Holy Week—and entered a side-chapel with the above ladies. Gabrielle's religious professions do not, however, appear to have been of a particularly ardent nature since she spent the time in reading aloud to Mdlle. de Guise some letters she had received from Rome, in which she was informed that all she desired would shortly be granted by the Pope. She also read to her companion two letters full of love and passion which she had that day received from the King—so that, as an earlier writer has well remarked, "*Voilà le Saint Office bien entendu!*"

Following on these devout proceedings she entered the garden of Zamet when she complained of feeling ill and, after sinking into a seat, requested that she might be taken back at once to the Deanery and put to bed, and that another courier should be immediately sent off for her aunt.

From this time she gradually became worse and, although the doctors considered that she had undoubtedly been poisoned, it was impossible for them to administer any remedies or antidotes to her, since she

was evidently about to become once more a mother. What the unfortunate creature experienced at this period from the practices of the day in surgery and medicine cannot be related; it is sufficient to say that she was bled time after time until, at last, she must have died from exhaustion if she had not expired from other causes. Her death took place amidst frightful agonies and in efforts to breathe which were so violent that, when she was dead, her mouth was reported to be out of place and her whole face so hideous that it was impossible to look upon her. To add additional horror to this death-bed on which she had suffered the most terrible convulsions followed by a total loss of the power to speak, hear, see or move, crowds were admitted to pass through her room and observe her, some being so terrified by her appearance that they hurried away faster than they had come, while others knelt and prayed God to have mercy on her for her life and her faults in consideration of the benefit which this sudden death would be to the future of France.*

* Gabrielle was dressed by her aunt in royal robes—crimson velvet passemented with gold—after her death. The contrast of this magnificent attire with the distorted face of the dead woman caused a thrill to all who passed through the room where she lay—namely, more than twenty thousand people. Her relatives, including her four sisters, abstained from demanding an inquiry into the manner of her death, nor did Henri order one to be made. He wore mourning for her for three months, and it was observed that, in this case, it was black and not purple.

Whether this woman who had risen, as a subject, to the highest rank as a duchess, and would indubitably have sat by the side of Henri as queen had she lived, was poisoned or not, has remained a mystery until this day. An autopsy was made and her liver and one lung were discovered to be diseased, while a lemon which she had eaten at Zamet's was supposed to have done her much harm. There were also those who remembered that fruit was often used as a channel by which poison might be conveyed, while the remark of her physician on quitting the death chamber, "*Hic est manus Dei*," was interpreted in different ways, some saying that it meant that her death was the act of God alone, and others that God had inspired some person, or persons, to remove her ere she should bring disgrace and shame on France.

The connection of Sully with this matter, to speak of him by the title which he had not yet acquired but by which he is best known, has now to be considered.

It has been stated that Gabrielle had deeply irritated his wife, La Baronne de Rosny, by her haughty and imperious airs, and by having informed that lady that she authorized her to attend her *lever* and *coucher* in future.*

* The royal custom in France of permitting courtiers to attend the getting up and going to bed of the King, and, in the case of ladies, that of the Queen. Gabrielle would not be likely to omit the practice. From the former is derived what we term in English, "the levée."

Furious with rage at this condescension, la Baronne flew to her husband and, losing all control over herself, gave full vent to her temper. Sully, whose frequent task it was to soothe the outbreaks of his wife, endeavoured to do so on this occasion and, in the attempt, uttered the words "that she would soon see something startling" ("*beau jeu et bien joué*") "*if the rope does not break.*" Three days later, receiving at dawn, at his seat at Rosny, the news that Gabrielle was dead, he rushed into his wife's room, embraced her and said, "My child, you will go to neither the *lever* nor the *coucher*, because *the rope is broken.* Since, however, she is really dead, may God give her a long, good life" ("in Paradise," being, of course, intended).

It is the utterance of these few words composing Sully's first remark to Madame de Rosny (in connection with another matter to be dealt with presently) that has cast upon his memory a stain incapable of erasure, though not one in which is comprised the darkest hue, namely, that attached to the crime of murder. Yet how—considering that the words were uttered on the day Gabrielle arrived in Paris and when she was perfectly well—is he to be acquitted of the knowledge that she would soon be removed from this earth: how is he to be set free from the suspicion of being an accomplice before the event? It seems that he must have

known what was about to happen and, although he stood outside the actual commission of the crime, he, who was the most powerful subject in France, took no steps to prevent it. That he hated Gabrielle has always been well-known and was well-known at the time; he doing so partly because her influence over Henri was greater than his own, partly because she treated him with contemptuous scorn, as when she spoke of him to Henri and before his own face as "*un valet*," and partly, also, because he was anxious to see his master married to a woman of royal birth who was able at the same time to bring a great dowry with her. On the other hand, he owed her family something, and, with his harsh, autocratic nature, it may have been the case that it was natural to him to loathe any person, except his master, from whom he had received benefits. The position of *Surintendant des Finances*, which he now held, had been conferred on Gabrielle's father, but he, probably for some very good reason connected with his daughter's future, had elected to transfer that high office to Sully himself.

One pauses baffled, however, in any attempt to unravel the skein when it is recalled—on endeavouring to understand Sully's undoubted knowledge of Gabrielle's impending fate—that he himself has narrated the interviews with his wife, as well as the above-quoted

words, in that most remarkable farrago of distorted facts and almost unintelligible verbiage which is known as his *Œconomies Royales.** For, with this avowal staring us in the face, what construction are we to put on the man's action? Under his own hand, or those of his secretaries, he shows us that he must have known of Gabrielle's nearness to death, yet he appears not to see that, in doing so, he proves that her death was decided on and that he was in the secret. Or is it bravado which induces him to reveal himself thus? Or, again, was there no intention at the time of letting this diary, for such it is, see the light until he himself was dead? Or did he think that all who afterwards read of the knowledge which he possessed, but did not use to save the doomed woman, would consider his conduct worthy of approval, and be also willing to regard him in the light of one who had preserved Henri from an irreparable error and France from a great disaster?

One portion of this mystery, however, still remains unexplained and, unless the antique jargon in which Sully and his secretaries indulged—it being more the

* The title given by Sully to his work. It appeared, however, as *Mémoires des Sages et Royale Œconomies, etc.* It has been conjectured that the secretaries were supposititious, and only introduced by Sully to prevent him from appearing to be too self-laudatory. This may be so, but Sully did not suffer from overweening modesty.

French of Brantôme and his predecessors than that of a Court surrounded by many cultivated scholars and well-educated men and women—was at the root of the mystery, it can never be explained. He himself states that his expression to his wife, when endeavouring to calm her, was that she would see "*un beau jeu et bien joué si la corde ne rompait.*" "Si la corde *ne* rompait!" What does this mean? To what cord is he referring which would bring ease to his wife, "if it did *not* break," while, on the contrary, it should, judging by results, have caused her much satisfaction if it did? To attempt to find an answer to this question a further one must be put. Was the "cord" Gabrielle's existence? But, if so, and it did *not* break, where and when was the *beau jeu bien joué* to take place, and how? Granting that the cord was this existence and that it did *not* break, she was in a fortnight's time to have attained to so high a position that the future Duchesse de Sully would have sunk to vast insignificance in comparison with her, while Gabrielle, gentle as she ordinarily was, would never have forgotten the opposition of Sully to her marriage with the King, nor his wife's frequent attempts—in her position, as well as in the character of an irreproachable matron—to put the mistress in her proper place.

Now, in contradistinction to this is the statement

that when Gabrielle was dead and Sully burst into his wife's bedroom to inform her of the fact, the words he used were "*la corde est rompue.*" Therefore, it seems that what was hoped for and expected, in his house at least, was that the rope *would* break, and not that the *beau jeu* which was desired would be well played if it did *not* break. Consequently, posterity is still in the dark as to what Sully knew, or did not know, of the tragedy that was about to occur, and as to whether, as has been suggested, he uttered the first expression only with a view to consoling his irritated spouse and phrased it wrongly, or whether—which is the poorest, though probably the most accurate surmise—the extraordinary phraseology of himself and his assistants led to the remark being written wrongly and never set right when it was printed. This idea is the more likely to be an accurate one since the sentence itself is not properly completed, but should have been written *si la corde ne rompait pas,* or, *ne rompe pas,* and not *ne rompait.*

Nevertheless, it appears impossible that any one of these surmises can be right. Sully had at his command all the resources of the power possessed by the great feudal noblesse; he towered above all the heads of the representatives of the leading houses in France; he was the first subject in the kingdom, yet Henri, who

behaved to him more as if he were his brother than a subject, would not, with all his regard for him, have tolerated his farther existence for a single hour after he had discovered—if he ever should discover—that Sully had been cognisant of the impending murder of the fondly-loved woman who was to have been his queen. The risk of merely knowing that such a plot was in the wind was, therefore, terrible, and even though Sully did know of such a plot and escaped detection, is it possible that years afterwards, when both Henri and Gabrielle had long been in their graves, he would deliberately have sat down to dictate to his scribes a circumstance the knowledge of which should for ever tarnish him in the eyes of all posterity?

What, therefore, remains for that posterity to imagine after rising from a perusal of the incident, but one thing, namely, that Sully used the expression, "*si la corde ne rompait*" only with a view to calming the transports of rage into which his wife had lashed herself over Gabrielle's offensive patronage, and that, by one of those extraordinary chances, one of those strange successes which occasionally take place when it is long odds against their being achieved, the sinister suggestion had been verified, the guess at hazard had become true? In this case, a vain-glorious person, wishing to stand well in the eyes of futurity, might

be suddenly incited to write down that which, while doing credit either to his perspicacity or his clear knowledge of all that was passing around and beneath him, was capable of bearing—that must bear—an interpretation which would leave a blot on his memory for ever.

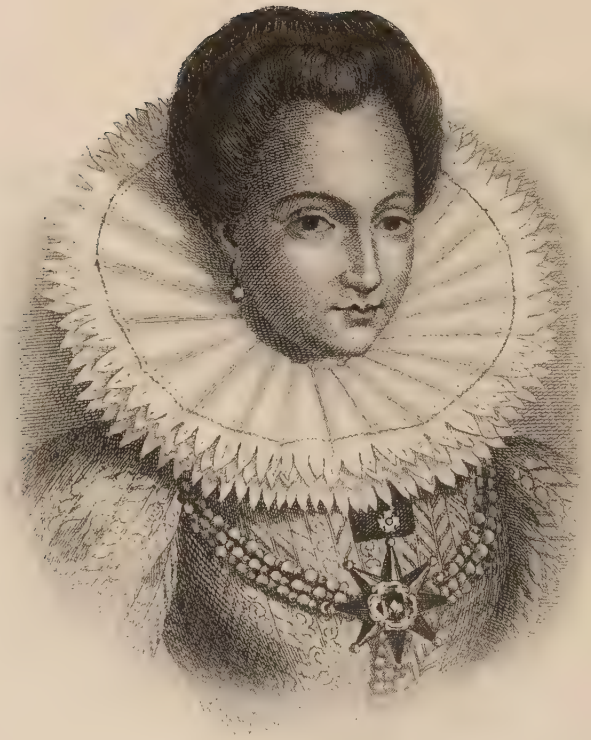
In any circumstance, the statement was an extremely hazardous one, since, after all that ever came to light on the subject of Gabrielle's death, there remained, and still remains, the doubt whether she was actually poisoned. Two important portions, at least, of her body were diseased; there was also a suspicion that she was suffering from stone; the pangs of maternity were upon her and, consequently, it scarcely required the aid of poison to put an end to her life. Henri himself could hardly have believed that its aid had been called in since, if it was administered at all, it must have been given on the night she supped with Zamet, yet shortly after Gabrielle's death the Italian was given a high post, namely, the Governorship of Fontainebleau—the country residence *par excellence* of Royalty at this period. The King also expressed himself satisfied with the truth of the reports made to him on the subject, and from that time forth the matter became of little importance to any but historians.

We now come, however, to a circumstance in Sully's

own narrative, the *Œconomies Royales*, in which, for some reason connected with the above affair, he has chosen to give a copy of a letter which was fabricated, and, undoubtedly, fabricated by him alone.

For some purpose almost, if not entirely, inexplicable —since every one of the persons with whom it deals had been dead for years—it suited him to throw a false light on all the circumstances connected with the last moments of Gabrielle. But if he had any purpose at all, it was to throw suspicion on the memory of Zamet (who died nineteen years after her and twenty before the Memoirs were published); the man who had been much liked by Henri and was, consequently, as much an object of hatred to Sully as was the chief of all favourites—the mistress and prospective future Queen. But Sully never brooked or spared a rival in the good graces of his master, and the thirty-nine years which had elapsed since the woman went to her grave and the twenty which had passed since the man had gone to his were powerless to heal his rancour.

The letter is to be read by all who care to peruse the *Œconomies Royales*, and it is, therefore, unnecessary to do more than give a brief synopsis of it. It purports to be written by one La Varenne, who was a State official (not to be confused with Isaac de Varennes, a spy, who will be mentioned later), and was also a



Gabrielle d'Estrées (Duchesse de Beaufort).

[*Facing p.* 133

confidential courier of Henri. It commences by narrating how he accompanied Gabrielle from Fontainebleau to Zamet's house, where she was *lodged*. It next adds that she was treated by the wealthy financier to a meal consisting of viands of the most *recherché* and delicate nature, which he knew to be particularly to her taste. Here begins the attack on the memory of the Italian which refutes itself. In the first place, Gabrielle was *not* lodged at Zamet's house, but in the Deanery of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, and, in the second, as she had come to Paris ostensibly *pour faire ses Pâques* it is most unlikely that, in the presence of her own attendants—officers of the *garde de corps*, and others whom Henri had sent in her train—to say nothing of Zamet's household, she would have partaken of any *viande* at all. Moreover, indulgence at the table was never one of the failings attributed to Gabrielle. And, again, considering the delicate condition in which she was, it is absolutely improbable that she would, in any circumstance, have been willing to indulge her tastes, even supposing that she possessed them.

There is a good deal more of the same kind of invention introduced into this supposed letter which never saw the light until La Varenne had been dead two years less than Zamet, namely, twenty-one years after Gabrielle; and the most remarkable thing about all

the statements is that, where there is not absolute and trustworthy refutation of them, they refute themselves. For instance, La Varenne is made to say that he is sending off this letter hurriedly after writing it at Gabrielle's bedside, yet he is also made to state that he is " holding this unfortunate woman in my arms with a view to stilling her agony," and that he doubts if she will be alive in another hour, so great are her sufferings. Verily, he must have been a man of iron resolution if he could write at all in such circumstances, as well as one gifted with extraordinary facility in the use of his arms and hands. Messages sent off from the bedsides of dying persons are generally of a more hurried nature than this !

We may now leave this remarkable letter, the explanation of which apparently lies in the suggestion already made, and turn for a moment to the *Œconomies Royales*, since they form one of the most extraordinary productions in the way of memoir-writing ever given to an astonished world.

Sully had retired to his estate of Rosny, in the Province of Artois, shortly after the assassination of Henri, and it would appear that, in this somewhat gloomy solitude, he soon afterwards devoted himself to the preparation of these memoirs, which he dictated to the four secretaries who accompanied him. He also

ordered a printer of Angers to bring his presses to the Château de Rosny (printing-presses were small, insignificant things in those days), and to be prepared to produce impressions of the manuscript as soon as the sheets were completed. Sully had, however, as adjuncts to his literary labours, four other individuals of far greater use to him than any of his secretaries or the printer and his man. These were no less personages than four of the most important writers of memoirs of the time who happened to have published or *passed away* before Sully also began to publish, and who could, therefore, provide him with "copy" which, with all his knowledge—and it was enormous—of *les affaires*, he might not have been able to otherwise produce. One, the most important of all, was none other than Pierre L'Estoile, whose journal had appeared in 1621; another was d'Aubigné, who wielded a good pen with as much facility as he had earlier wielded a good sword in the cause of the Huguenots.* His *Histoire Universelle* had appeared in the years 1616–18–20. A third was Palma Cayet, who had published, in 1605, his book, entitled *Chronologie Septénaire*, in which *he* made the mistake of saying that Gabrielle was lodged *with Zamet;* and a fourth was Legrain who, in his *Décade*, followed

* Madame de Maintenon was, in after days, proud of her grandfather's literary gifts. She, however, preserved strict silence on his religious faith when she had become a Roman Catholic.

him; while, as a matter of fact, d'Aubigné and L'Estoile had hinted at the same thing. Here, therefore, is to be perceived the manner in which Sully made one out of many of his principal errors in the fabricated letter of La Varenne. In his inexplicable desire to deceive others he had copied authors who had themselves been deceived or were mistaken.

The description of the *Œconomies Royales* given earlier is not an unjust one. The language is archaic to a degree, as may be witnessed by any person possessing little more than an elementary knowledge of seventeenth century French, or by anyone who will take the trouble to compare a volume of Mdlle. de Guise, or of d'Aubigné, or of L'Estoile, with the great Minister's own production. It may be urged, it is true, that Sully was more a man of business, or a rude soldier, than aught else, while Mdlle. de Guise was a princess of the illustrious house of that name, and had undoubtedly received all the advantages of an education which her family would take care to provide; * that d'Aubigné was the son of a Huguenot gentleman of good estate, and a man who loved literature; that L'Estoile was a member of one

* In recent years the novels of Mdlle. de Guise have been attributed to other persons, notably, to the Duc de Bellegarde. Nothing, however, exists that tends to prove that the attribution is a just one. Mdlle. de Guise, who married first the Prince de Conti and afterwards, secretly, Bassompierre, was more likely to be able to write such novels than was the good-looking and dissolute duke.

of the best families of the Law and a cultivated man of easy means ; and that he, himself, had been *premier audiencier* of Chancery and was an omnivorous reader and a copious writer. But the family of Sully was, as has been shown, superior to any of the families of the others, if not so powerful as that of the de Guises ; we know that he had been sent to a good school in Paris ; he had filled the office of ambassador to the most renowned Court in Europe, that of England, and had held the highest positions in his own country.

Yet he adopted, among other forms of writing, one which can only be called puerile, namely, that of causing his secretaries to address his own remarks to himself. Thus he commences every chapter with " You received," " You set out for," etc., etc., while the laboured style, the, even for that period, antique expressions, the sentences tangled one in another and placed in parentheses one after the other, are little short of maddening. To all of which has to be added the fact that one learns to regard a very considerable portion of the book as anything but trustworthy, and as being written only to gratify the author's desire of justifying himself, or of withholding praise from others, while, after the perusal of the supposed letter of La Varenne, who, if he wrote any of it, probably only scratched off a few hasty lines as he sat by the side of Gabrielle's death-bed, we lose

all confidence in any portion of the book not confirmed from other sources. Fortunately, however, such confirmation is frequently found to be the case.

On the appearance of two volumes of the memoirs about seven years before the author's death, they were received with an amount of adverse criticism such as, probably, has never been accorded to any other work of the same nature, and has certainly never been accorded to the book of a man whose position had once been that of the first subject in Europe. The attack was led off by the secretary of Du Plessis-Mornay (a Huguenot nobleman of high rank and himself a most copious writer*), a man named Marbault, who, like his employer, was also bitterly hostile to Sully. But Marbault's attacks, and they are mostly justified, are now usually printed as an appendix to the memoirs themselves, and it is, therefore, unnecessary to quote much from them. An exception may, however, be made and attention drawn to the fact that the writer put his finger at once on a proof that La Varenne could never have written the letter attributed to him. La Varenne was a gentleman and a courtier, and well acquainted with all forms and ceremonies, as well as

* He was closely attached to Henri for over twenty-five years and rendered him faithful service. His master said jokingly of him: "I can at any moment make a good captain out of that old writing-desk." Naturally Sully did not like this nobleman.

ceremonial addresses usual and proper in Court circles, and also with all matters of etiquette.* Yet he is made to address Sully in the supposed letter as *Monseigneur*, a title only due to the highest ecclesiastics and to some dukes who were also peers (*Ducs et Pairs de France*). Dukes who had not this right were addressed as "Monsieur le Duc," while those who did possess it were addressed, though sometimes wrongly, as "Monseigneur le Duc"; those who were of the royal blood, legitimate or legitimatized, were addressed as "Votre altesse, Monseigneur le Duc," or as "Monseigneur."

Now Sully was not a duke at the time of the death of Gabrielle, nor was he to become one until seven years after that death, namely, in 1606, when he was created "Duc de Sully, *Pair de France*, and Captain General of the Gendarmes of the Queen."

It stands to reason, therefore, that a skilled courtier would not have made such a mistake, but would also have been scrupulous not to apply a title to a man who would doubtlessly resent any attempt to describe him as what he did not happen to be.

Marbault found, however, many other "wilful" errors of the same kind and pointed them out. One was a letter attributed to Marguerite de Valois on the

* By many writers La Varenne was said to have been a scullion, which was false. He was descended from an ancient family in Navarre. He eventually attained high rank and died a marquis.

subject of the then impending marriage of Gabrielle, in which she is represented as using language about the favourite which would have disgraced the women of Les Halles, while the worst expression she ever did use was when she called Gabrielle "*sale et vilaine.*" This alone refutes the possibility of the letter having been written by the last surviving Valois. Whatever the faults and failings of Marguerite may have been in her earlier days coarseness was not one of them, and she would not have debased herself by the use of such words as Sully attributes to her pen.

Marbault had a sufficiency of companions in his attack on the *Œconomies Royales.* Indeed, there was no writer of the period who did not contribute his aid to expose the inaccuracies of the book and the vain self-glorification which was apparent in even the enormously lengthy and cumbersome title in which he speaks of himself as contributing, "Useful services, suitable obedience and loyal administration," and as "being one of the trustworthy and useful soldiers and servitors of the great French Mars."

The manner in which criticism was forthcoming on any important book, or rather on a book by any person who was, or had once been, of importance, forms an interesting subject for consideration, especially as it

applies not only to the method by which books were produced, but also to the manner in which criticisms, generally in the form of special leaflets or pamphlets, also met the eye of the public. There was still no newspaper published in France in the early days of Louis XIII.—outside the production called the *Mercure François** on which Richelieu poured his contempt later, though three years before the first two volumes of the *Œconomies Royales* were published the *Gazette de France* had sprung into a feeble existence and commenced its long career. The latter was then, however, a puny thing, and although under royal patronage (Louis occasionally favoured it with a few paragraphs on matters which he considered would be interesting to his subjects, and often left them at the printer's himself) gave none too favourable signs that it had a future before it.

Consequently, there were no "professional" critics. But there were many persons who were, nevertheless, always anxious to perform that office in particular cases—in the case, say, of an enemy's, and, sometimes, of a friend's book—as there were also others who required the services of a clever writer to review a rival's book. The method of procedure was, therefore, to

* More a book of dates than a journal, and a continuation of *Septénaire*. It existed from 1605 to 1644.

purchase the work, or if, as in the case of Sully's magnificently produced volumes, that was too expensive an affair, to obtain a sight of it. Then, when the criticism was finished, a mode of publication had to be brought into play. This was, however, easy enough, provided that either the writer, or the man whose *employé* he happened to be, was able to pay for the cost of production.

If there were no newspapers neither were there any publishers. Indeed, publishers as they are now understood had no existence, and did not begin to have any in France for more than a century; and the case was not very dissimilar in most of the other countries of Europe. But printers there had been ever since Koster, Fust, Gutenberg, or Caxton first undertook the trade, and, though they embarked no money in the productions which issued from their presses, their business was to work for those who would do so. And, if those in Paris were not publishers, the signs of their houses, their names, and the numbers of the streets in which they lived, played the part that the name of a publisher of to-day plays, and the author, or the author's employer, paid all expenses and afterwards found the means of distribution. The book had, however, to pass the Censor, who was generally a Chancellor of the High Court, ere it could announce that it had received the

Approbation et Privilége du Roi and before the printer could put his name and address to it, while, if it did not pass the Censor and receive that approbation, there remained still another system. Books, in increasing numbers as time went on, were published in Holland and, not having, therefore, obtained approbation and privilege, were smuggled into France and distributed more or less surreptitiously in large quantities. These were mostly works that dealt in libel or scandal, or too much unpalatable truth; books that told of the peccadilloes of women of high rank, of the indiscretions of maids of honour, of the frauds of highly-placed officials and the brutal behaviour of members of the aristocracy, and also of the lives of courtesans, poisoners and, as often as not, of priests. At the same time, there remained a third method of evading the Censor which had the advantage of rendering unnecessary the importation of books from abroad. This was the simple one of printing them in France, but of placing on the title-page the supposititious name of some printer, in company with the borrowed name of Amsterdam or the Hague, or elsewhere. In this manner criticisms and other brochures, as well as books, were distributed in pamphlet form and either sold in secret places well-known to buyers of such literature, or, in many cases, openly in the streets, on the bridges—which were much

frequented for meeting and assembly—and sometimes outside the churches.*

Since Sully may, perhaps, have imagined that he had survived most of his jealous enemies and envious friends by the time he published his first two volumes of the *Œconomies Royales*, it is extraordinary that they should themselves have borne the name of Amsterdam† as the place of publication on their first page, and especially so as he made no secret that he was writing them. His name, with the boastful address to readers, was also there—but the printer he employed lived at Angers! Such, however, was the case, and since it is impossible to suppose that the work was bound and arranged for publication anywhere else than in France, it must be presumed that this was one more weakness in a really great mind which could, nevertheless, stoop to the self-glorification that Sully frequently indulged in. Yet considerable reflection is needed on the matter before we can bring ourselves to suppose, or imagine, how Sully's vanity could be ministered to by such an action. When, however, it is recalled that all books surreptitiously published, or supposed to be published,

* L'Estoile, a great buyer of books and pamphlets of this nature, is very full of information on the subject.

† The indication on the title-page is "*Amstelerdam chez 'Aleithinos-graphe.'*" If any doubt could exist as to whether the indication is true or false this folly should decide it.

abroad, were books of which prominent people were often afraid, the reason may be divined at last without much difficulty.

The third and fourth volumes of the *Œconomies Royales* were published years after the writer's death at Sully—a large estate which the Duke bought and from which he took his title—namely, in 1662. These received but little more notice than is usually accorded to continuations of memoirs or recollections which, exciting as their first part may have been, have come too late to appeal to the public that is at last to read them. Moreover, a greater even than he—Richelieu—had held the reins—and the King (Louis XIII.)—in his hands; and both Henri and Sully were long since gone. Sully's work of forty years before, if not his reputation, had therefore become obsolete and the books fell flat. Eighty-three years later, in 1745, the Abbé de L'Écluse produced an edition of this extraordinary achievement, his object being to put it into proper and readable French. In this he succeeded, but in some way he failed to convey to the public to which it appealed all the interest, as well as useful political history, that—excluding the above-mentioned "mis-statements," and some others—it undoubtedly contained.

Sully's literary efforts were not, however, confined solely to this stupendous undertaking. He produced

some treatises on the art of war, and a book of instructions to police and militia; he perpetrated some poetry and—marvel of marvels!—he wrote a novel entitled *Gelastide*. This work never got beyond manuscript form, but it was long cherished by his descendants and exhibited to those eager to see it. It must, indeed, have been interesting to regard as a curiosity, even though the perusal of it might not have furnished much entertainment. He never attempted another form of literature, namely, that of dramatic composition, but he was at one time frequently made the hero of dramas written round his career. Not one of them, however, found favour with the public at any time, or held the boards for more than a night or so.

Faulty as was Sully in many ways—in his detestation of all other favourites, male and female, of the King—and sour, morose, bad-mannered and often brutal, he possessed several excellent qualities which counted for much in making him the principal Minister and subject of his master. His best characteristics were rugged fidelity and personal courage equal to that of Henri himself. He was, indeed, like some savage mastiff who will never quit his owner yet will rend to pieces any other person who draws near. This may have

been the reason for his antagonism to Gabrielle and afterwards to Henriette d'Entragues, though that antagonism was more owing to the injury which he recognized that a marriage with either would entail on Henri and on France—which latter stood second in his heart!—than absolute hatred of the ladies themselves, in spite of their scorn of him. Purity could scarcely have been the motive for this feeling, since, when Condé was known to be about to flee with his wife to Brussels, there to escape from Henri's attention to the latter, Sully said roughly that Henri had better shut Condé up in the Bastille and leave the princess to her fate than let the former throw himself into the arms of the Spaniards. His roughness had, indeed, become almost a proverb, and he probably never met his match except in the Duc d'Épernon—that meretricious example of the medieval type of swashbuckler—who addressed him with such intemperance of language, and threatened him with such personal violence, that Sully drew his sword in self-defence.

In the reign of James I. he was sent as a special ambassador to England for a short time, but his first visit had been to Dover, in 1601, at a moment when Elizabeth happened to be there in one of her various journeyings and progresses about her kingdom, and when Henri chanced to be at Calais. The Queen of

England, hearing of this latter fact, wrote a cordial letter to Henri, in which she addressed him as her " dear and well-beloved brother," and described herself as " his very loyal sister and faithful ally." She also expressed her regret that they were both forbidden by certain customs from meeting, although so near, especially as she had at one time promised herself the happiness of " kissing him and embracing him with both arms." She had, she also wrote, something to tell him which she did not feel disposed to write, or confide, to either his representatives or her own.

Upon this, Henri, who was extremely pleased with the cordiality of his great neighbour, sent for Sully and bade him set out for Dover at once, which he did. He had, however, resolved to be extremely discreet in his method of approaching the Queen, and, consequently, when the Earl of Pembroke and Lord Cavendish encountered him he said that he had simply come over to Dover for a change of air and to walk about the town, and that neither had he a letter for the Queen nor desired her to know that he was in her neighbourhood as, otherwise, she might be offended at his not paying his respects to her. The two noblemen, however, burst out laughing at this and, a few moments later, an officer of the Queen's guards accosted him, told him jokingly that he was a prisoner, and took him before

QUEEN ELIZABETH.
(Artist unknown. Engraved by Vertue.)

[*Facing p.* 148

Elizabeth. She, being also in a merry mood, asked him what he meant by coming into her country without paying her a visit, and said that, since he had nothing to say to her she had something to say to him, and bade him follow her. When alone, she informed him that what she desired was to form an alliance with the King of France against Spain and Austria, and they then and there drew out the basis of the alliance which, however, was never ratified owing to the death of Elizabeth not long afterwards.

Sully's hatred of Concini—the most pardonable one in which he ever indulged—was such that he would never speak to him if he could possibly avoid doing so, and he generally favoured the Italian upstart with nothing more than a full view of his back. It is stated that his reason for quitting the Court after the assassination of Henri was that he could not tolerate being forced to come into contact with the man. Nevertheless the adventurer had his revenge on the day after the King's murder, when he caused to be painted upon the gates of Sully's courtyard the words, "*Un valet à louer ici.*" This unfortunate word "*valet*" does indeed seem to have attached itself considerably to Sully, remembering Gabrielle and her successor, Henriette d'Entragues.

As a worker he was indefatigable. He rose at four o'clock in winter and summer; at six he dressed for

the day; at seven he entered the Council Chamber; at mid-day he dined alone with his wife and children, after which he gave audience until seven, when he had supper and then went to bed. His manner of giving audience was on a par with his usual rudeness and brusque behaviour. He rarely rose from his seat to greet any who presented themselves, and, if he happened to be writing when a visitor was ushered in, he did not take the trouble to raise his eyes in acknowledgment of the other's presence. There is a story told (though on no very good authority, since it appears in an anonymous collection of anecdotes of *La vie et les habitudes de Monsigneur le feu Duc de Sully*) of how this once happened when the English ambassador was conducted to his audience-room. The ambassador stood silent for a moment regarding Sully, after which he said, "It is possible that Monseigneur is not aware that Queen Elizabeth of England is present in the person of her representative in France."

As Sully had before this made acquaintance with Elizabeth during his own mission to her, and as he was thoroughly cognisant of what power she could exert in helping the Protestants, his apologies—which were not often forthcoming—were profuse.

His brutality was, in some cases, savagery of the worst form. When he was sent to London, one of his

suite, a young gentleman of good family, was so irritated at the jeers of the crowd at the Frenchmen that he became involved in an argument with some of the mob who were looking on, and, in a moment of heat, struck one of them. On this coming to Sully's ears he instantly ordered that his follower should be put to death—where and how the execution could have taken place one does not know!—and he was so determined that this should be done that it required all the persuasions of the English Court to make him understand that the *contretemps* was of no particular importance. His tongue was also a very unruly member, though he could scarcely be blamed for a remark he made to Louis XIII. when that monarch summoned him from his retreat to give some advice on a subject which he was well qualified to elucidate.

Sully appeared, as was his invariable habit, dressed in the style of forty years before, and the courtiers, who were not accustomed to witness such a specimen of the past as he presented, indulged in a good many sneers and jeers at his antiquated appearance. Upon which the old man said in a loud tone to the King, "Sire, when your father did me the honour to consult me, he first of all turned all the fools and buffoons out of the room." Louis XIII. had the good grace to follow his father's custom.

At his three seats, Sully, Rosny and Villebon,* he lived in great state and circumstance surrounded by his squires, pages, guards and gentlemen-in-waiting, and, though all were well-paid, lodged and fed, strict economy was practised and waste severely blamed, if not punished. This carefulness, combined with free handedness, is far more entitled to admiration than contempt, though, as a matter of fact, had Sully been twice as lavish, and had he exercised little or no care in his household expenses, his fortune would not have permitted him to be affected by any careless profusion.

He had, in his long service to his master, grown enormously rich; indeed, he had begun to accumulate wealth from the outset. He had bought many properties as speculations, all of which he generally managed to part with at a considerable profit, but Sully and Villebon were early added to his patrimonial estate of Rosny. As, gradually, he retired from his various employments under the State, he disposed of them to his successors (all public employments being sold in France at this period, as well as long before and long after Sully's time, in much the same way as military

* The terminal adjective of "*bon*" for "*bonne*" is somewhat strange. It is not, however, exceptional, as such errors in the adjective exist even to these days. There is now a small paper published in Paris called "*La* monde"; and the frontier station, where the train enters Alsace-Lorraine on the road to Basle, is named *Petit* Croix.

commissions of all grades were sold in England within most persons' recollections) for 760,000 livres, while three abbeys and many benefices which had been presented to him by Henri were sold for 240,000 livres. He also received from Marie de Médici, until she was exiled, a yearly pension of 48,000 livres.

In accordance with the habits of the time, he likewise made large sums out of his military services, and he acknowledged that, in one of the many expeditions against the Duke of Savoy which he directed, he gained 200,000 livres.

That all this accumulated wealth should give rise to much comment is not surprising, especially as Sully possessed more enemies than friends, while there were more persons envious of his career than even his enemies numbered, so that, like those of whom Dean Swift spoke, he was forced to take his distinction as he took his land, *cum onere*. Richelieu states that Henri was at one time about to remove Sully from the direction of the finances, since he had doubts as to the "cleanness of his hands." It has to be remembered, however, that Richelieu was not above a different form of that jealousy to which Sully was a victim. If the latter hated those contemporaries who rivalled him in the good graces of his master, the former was not able to withstand the chance of depreciating the high position of one who had

so closely preceded him and to whom he had been subordinate, and one who probably recognized also that, in the Bishop of Luçon, he was face to face with a genius which, in the days to come, would, with opportunity, far outshine his own.

The opportunity came and the star of Sully was eclipsed by that of Richelieu, but Richelieu could never forget that it had once blazed the most conspicuous of all surrounding it.

The old man died in 1641 when he was nearly eighty-two (his wife lived to the age of ninety-seven), while, with what seems to have been almost an irony of Fate, Henri endeavoured to persuade Sully's son and heir to marry Henriette de Vendôme, aged fourteen, daughter of Gabrielle d'Estrées—to still call her by her original name—whom Sully had so much hated and opposed. At his death the old order had indeed given place to the new; a change had occurred in France that, if Sully had observed it carefully, must have caused him many conflicting emotions. The boy who was to become Louis XIV. was born; Richelieu was dying of a cruel disease and Louis XIII.'s own death was known to be close at hand. The system of feudalism and villenage was passing away: territorial regiments, to take the place of vast bodies of men serving under their respective lords, were in conception and were soon to become an

CHARLES I. (by Vandyke).

[*Facing p.* 155

established fact. The French Navy, as a consolidated body, was the finest in the world and was to remain so until its defeat at La Hogue, by Russell, shattered for ever its pretensions to that position. Portugal had just broken away from her annexation by Spain in 1580, and was a restored kingdom; Cromwell had made his first speeches in Parliament and was soon to suggest that forces should be levied to oppose Charles I., and the Star Chamber was abolished; Concini* had been murdered

* The terrible deaths of Concini and his wife, and especially that of the former, may cause students of French history to remark a strange similarity between it and the death of the Princesse de Lamballe during the French Revolution.

Concini—the order for whose arrest had been issued by Louis XIII. —was about to enter the Louvre when Vitry, the Captain of the Guard, demanded his sword. Concini made a movement, either to defend himself or to obey the order, when he was shot three times by Vitry's men and fell dead. Louis, it has often been stated, was looking out from a window that gave upon the spot where Vitry was stationed. The Queen, hearing the reports of the pistols, sent one of her female attendants to discover what was the meaning of them, and the woman, seeing the Captain of the Guard calmly standing in the courtyard, asked him what had occurred. "The Marshal is killed," Vitry replied indifferently. "By whom?" "By me, by order of the King." This incident has always been selected by historians as the most certain proof that Louis was privy to the murder, especially as he witnessed it from the window and said nothing. The body of the Italian was at once pillaged by some of Vitry's men. One took his great diamond, another his jewel-hilted sword, a third his cloak, and a fourth his scarf. He was buried that night in the vaults of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois and disinterred the next day by the populace, who hated him. The body was then exposed outside the house of his friend, Barbin, and was subjected to the most horrible desecration. His features were destroyed, his limbs were mutilated, his heart was torn out and grilled and a portion of it eaten by the mob. One part of his remains was then burnt on

and his wife executed, while de Luynes had been dead twenty years. Corneille was a man of thirty-five and had produced *The Cid* (as well as some comedies), which revolutionized the theatrical world, and Racine was two years old. Sully had also lived to see a King upon the throne whose life had been immaculate in its purity—whatever other defects it possessed—and a Court in which the existence of *Maîtresses-en-titre* seemed to be things that belonged to the manners and morals of the dark ages. Unfortunately, those who lived a few

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the Grève and another on the Pont Neuf, and the ashes were sold at so much an ounce.

The body of the Princesse de Lamballe was, one hundred and seventy-five years later, treated in an almost identical manner by the Revolutionists, even to the grossest outrages, and as a book (*La Galerie de l'ancienne Cour*) in which the murder and the mutilation of Concini is fully described was at this time republished, one is tempted to speculate as to whether that which happened to him was taken as a model for that which happened to her.

The defenders of the Revolution have often asked if the crimes and excesses of that terrible period in any way exceeded those of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, perpetrated by Charles IX.; or whether the murder of a Princess by the lower orders was any worse crime than the murder of Concini by an ancestor of that Princess? Except that Concini himself was an unscrupulous and overbearing adventurer, while the Princesse de Lamballe was a harmless and inoffensive woman who had never injured anyone, it must be admitted that the answer is difficult to find.

Concini's wife, La Galigaï, Maréchale d'Ancre, was herself executed on the Grève, her body burnt and the ashes flung to the winds.

De Luynes died of a fever five years later than the man whom he had supplanted, and, when he did so, Louis XIII. was no more affected by his death than he was by that of Concini, or, afterwards, by that of Richelieu, to whom he owed the fact that he was able to keep his crown and hand it down to his descendants.

years later were to be only too well-acquainted with the reappearance of such adjuncts to royalty.

Had Sully survived for seven months more he would have outlived Marie de Médici.

The Duchesse de Sully caused a superb white marble statue of her husband to be made in Italy which was placed in the Château de Villebon. It should have stood elsewhere, namely, in the heart of Paris and, for choice, near to, or opposite, that of his great master on the Pont Neuf.

For, with all his faults—and there were many that Sully possessed—he had, at least, the great merit of fidelity to the hand that caressed him—a virtue too often absent from our poor human nature. He was rough, uncouth, hard, and often insolent, even to his master. To his credit, however, he endeavoured in every way to curb that master in his weaknesses and failings, to cause him to be a better husband to the woman who was a good and loyal wife to him, if an ungracious one—and he was true to Henri in word, thought and deed. He tried, also, to prevent his reckless expenditure and the attempt was praiseworthy though rudely performed.

So far as one imperfect being can be a god to another, Henri was Sully's god, and the death of Henri was the eclipse of Sully's life. It has been said by cynics that

he could have worshipped none other who would have repaid him so well for his adoration, but, in spite of what has been stated as to his desire for money and great possessions, the remark may be dismissed as an unworthy one. He did grow rich in that master's service, but there were no original prospects of his ever doing so; he followed loyally the poor and, once, almost dethroned Huguenot King of Navarre and served him as faithfully as he afterwards did when he became the great King of France.

Of his *Œconomies Royales* something has been said here, and far more might have been said had space allowed; but, in sober fact, they harmed no one and nothing but himself and his own reputation; and, even at their worst, they are a valuable assistance to history. There is much vanity in them, much traducing of those who had aroused his jealousy; but, where no reason for envy or hatred can be traced, they may be thoroughly relied upon.

And, to end all, he was a true and faithful husband to both his wives, and an affectionate and careful father. In the sum of human qualities his good ones far exceeded the bad, and to this there has to be added the long-since recognized fact that he was a great and truly remarkable man.

Le Duc d'Épernon.

From a picture by an unknown artist, once in the possession of Madame de Sévigné.

[*Facing p.* 159.

CHAPTER IV

TRAITOR AND FAVOURITE—LE DUC D'ÉPERNON AND HENRIETTE, MARQUISE DE VERNEUIL

JEAN LOUIS DE NOGARET, DE LA VALETTE, Duc d'Épernon and *Pair de France*, who, at the time of the assassination of Henri IV., held the positions of an admiral of France, first gentleman of the chamber, colonel of all the infantry, and Governor of Angoumois, Saintonge and Aunis, la Rochelle, Limousin, Normandy, Loches and the district of Messin, was a man who, perhaps, more nearly represented the bravoes and bullies whom that eminent dramatist, M. Pixérécourt (the author of the *Forest of Bondy*, termed "*Le Chien de Montargis*," in France), was in the habit of providing for the French stage in the early part of the nineteenth century, or the bravoes and bullies whom our fathers and grandfathers were accustomed to see on the boards of the Surrey Theatre, than did any other person of his time.

In d'Épernon's earlier days he had been one of the

atrocious *mignons* who were the inseparable companions of Henri III. and shared in all his bestial pursuits, and he had taken part in arranging the savage duel in which he and his companions had involved Bussy d'Amboise and his friends. A little later he insulted the miserable king whose creature he was, and who bore his insolence without retaliating and while shedding tears; and, but a few days afterwards, in the presence of his master, he threatened to apply to Villeroy, a Secretary of State, as many kicks with his spurred boots as he would to a restive horse. Villeroy was, however, a man of a different type from Henri III. and d'Épernon saw fit to arrange terms of peace with him ere matters went any farther.

But the Duc d'Épernon can scarcely have cared for any of the occupations of those *mignons* of whom he was one, unless it were the outdoor portion of their existence devoted to insulting other persons, and, as a corollary, to running them through. He was, indeed, formed for stronger deeds than dressing himself as a wanton or singing vulgar and degrading songs to a worn-out voluptuary.

Born the son of a simple gentleman—some say of good family, though others state that he was a retired notary, which was not considered to be the position of a gentleman in the France of those days—d'Épernon

commenced to acquire wealth and rank by his servile ministering to the ignoble pleasures of Henri III. So early as his twenty-seventh year he had obtained from the latter the vast estate known as D'Éspernon,* which Henri created into a Duchy and then conferred upon his favourite, while ordering that he should take his place immediately after the princes of the blood-royal. As years went on d'Épernon's means continued to increase—his cupidity being equal to his desire for advancement and power—until at the end of his long life he was probably the richest subject in France who did not possess one drop of royal blood—Valois or Bourbon—in his veins.

The appearance of the man was but little in keeping with his character of bully or overbearing soldier and duellist, since he was small and insignificant as well as full-lipped and inclined to be bald, but his disposition was in keeping with his temper. He was impatient under contradiction, unsociable, haughty with his equals and brutal to his inferiors, a civil answer or remark being only accorded by him to those who, he very well knew, were able either to extort it or punish him for not according it freely. On one occasion, however, at the end of his life, he was so severely humiliated that the disgrace administered such a shock to his

* The earlier spelling of the name.

already worn-out system that it was considered by many to have brought about his death.

During his tenure of the governorship of Guienne —from which he drew two million livres a year—he got into a dispute with the Archbishop of Bordeaux over some prerogatives, and also some sums of money to which he considered himself entitled. The Archbishop refusing to accord these, d'Épernon caused the carriage of the prelate to be stopped by his soldiers, whereupon the Archbishop descended from it, excommunicated the men, and retreated into his palace. D'Épernon at once besieged the palace and, entering it forcibly, brutally assaulted the Archbishop, struck him about the body and knocked his hat off with his cane, when he himself was also excommunicated. Louis XIII., hearing of this, removed d'Épernon from all his offices and exiled him to Coutras. The braggart had then to write to the Archbishop pleading for pardon, which he did not receive until he had sued for it and for a removal of the excommunication on his knees, and had been forced to listen to a reproof of the most humiliating nature.

Ere, however, this time arrived, he had passed long years in endeavouring to overthrow the attempts of Henri IV. to obtain the crown; in revolting against him when it was obtained, in cringing for pardon for

each offence from the moment it was discovered, and in immediately putting into action a fresh piece of treason. Indeed, if, in his black heart, there was one spot more evil than the others, it must have been that in which was contained his hatred for Henri IV. He had fought against him as an open enemy—which was no crime !—yet had not the common honesty of an open enemy and a worthy foe to refrain from plotting against Henri when peace was made ; nor, indeed, had he even the loyalty of one conspirator towards another. When plots were in the air he was of them, yet never was his name known, or his part in them discovered, until the time had passed when his treachery could produce any ill-effects towards him.

When Henri III. was assassinated, many of the leading nobles of France, recognizing that the wisest act on their part would be to accept Henri of Navarre as their King, determined to sign a proclamation acknowledging him. D'Épernon expressed his willingness to do so—yet, on the time arriving, he invented a sly excuse for refusing. He had had time for reflection ! He recalled the fact that Henri would, if he now signed the proclamation, become his King, and that, consequently, any act on his part against that King could be adjudged treachery. Also, he did not forget that he had grown enormously wealthy and that, as a traitor to his bond

of fidelity, it would be possible for him to be deprived of that wealth even if his life were spared; while, should he be able to keep on good terms with the man who was now almost certain to become King of France, his vast fortune might be still more increased. As for treason, he could, in any case, practise it in private, and at the same time there would not be the damning evidence against him of his own signature.

A reason had, however, to be given for his refusal to sign which should not make him stand out too conspicuously as an abstainer from an agreement to which men of far more illustrious family than his own had been willing to subscribe. His cunning was not long in devising a reason for that refusal. Two of the most important personages in France, the Marshal de Biron and the Marshal d'Aumont, happened to have already placed their names upon the proclamation, and d'Épernon, learning this, at once seized upon the fact as an excuse for not doing so himself. He stated that he had been quite willing to sign, but that he could not consent to prejudice his rank so far as to do so below the names of any persons not being Dukes and peers of France, as he was himself; after which he retired while still vociferating loudly that, outside the matter of the signature, he was as willing to welcome the King of

Navarre to the throne of France as any person in the land could be.

If this were by any possibility the case, the Duc d'Épernon took a strange way of testifying to it. From the time Henri became King of France, namely, in 1589, his whole career was spent in preventing him from enjoying the possession of his kingdom in peace. The League, under the command of the Duc de Mayenne, was still in watchful activity and could, if necessary, place in the field an army four times stronger in numbers than that of Henri. Nevertheless, the latter beat that army whenever he encountered it, and the siege of Arques, near Dieppe, and the battle of Ivry testified to the fact that the time was at hand when the crown would be secured to him and his descendants. Moreover, at this time there came to his assistance the most powerful ally that could have been found in Europe, namely, Elizabeth of England. She was at this period the true head of the Protestant Faith; not two years before Henri's accession she, aided by the subjects who worshipped her, had crushed the Spanish Armada which represented the Faith that she had good reason to hate; and the desire of her heart was that that Faith should never again obtain the importance it had once possessed.

Yet Spain still hoped for much, and, though recognizing that England had torn itself free for ever from

her grasp and her religion, she still anticipated that the dissensions in France might at least bring that country into her possession. If traitors on one side and assassins on the other could have conduced to this end, Spain would not have failed in her hopes. One of the latter had been found to slay the Prince of Orange, another had attempted to slay Elizabeth, a dozen and more had whetted their knives against Henri. While, for enemies against the latter, there was banded the greater part of the old nobility, who were all in favour of Philip II.'s desires, and, for traitors who would stop at nothing, there was—M. le Duc d'Épernon! Spain was pouring forth her gold—not by handsful, but by ship-loads—in the employment of assassins and traitors; it was not likely that, with his greed combined with his hatred for the monarch who knew him for what he was and despised him, d'Épernon would be out of the way while the golden showers were falling, and when there was an opportunity for wreaking his vengeance on a man whom he loathed.

He had for some years earlier been inclined towards Spain and her desires, and, even at the period when he was fighting as an open foe against Henri and disputing the possession of Provence against him, he was in the pay of Philip II. He was not, however, very successful in his efforts, as the young Duc de Guise, who was not

of The League, wrenched Marseilles, and, indeed, the whole of Provence, away from him. To console him, and to, if possible, bind him to his cause, Henri afterwards gave d'Épernon the government of Limousin, and conferred on him many other substantial benefits.

Become a member of the King's party, d'Épernon instantly commenced a series of intrigues against him, and even sought to draw Marie de Médici into compliance with his schemes ; but if he thought that he was throwing dust in the King's eyes he was never more mistaken. Henri knew the man's character thoroughly, and he soon recognized that, though d'Épernon was not above being bribed, he was far from likely to give any return for the gifts he received. Gradually, therefore, the latter's lucrative posts were withdrawn from him ; he ceased to be colonel-general of the infantry, and, which was the worst of all blows, Governor of Metz. This loss was, indeed, enormous to the intriguer, since Metz was close to the possessions of Spain and Austria (Franche-Comté and the Netherlands), with which he was constantly in communication, while the equally severe loss of his military command deprived him of an army which, when he should find it necessary, he could at any moment have thrown into the scales against Henri and for Spain. He had often boasted of "his Austrian Kingdom," as he termed Metz ; he was

now an exile from that kingdom and his rage was terrible, while his desire for vengeance was sharpened to a deadly degree.

The time for endeavouring to exercise that vengeance was, however, not yet at hand. The seed was sown, but it had yet to germinate. Later, we shall see what fruit its growth produced.

Meanwhile, the Duc d'Épernon was probably the best hated man in France, not only by the people but by those of his own rank ; and he, who was always ready to hurl insults and abuse at others, was, from the death of Henri III., himself the mark for much well-deserved obloquy. Brantôme narrates in his best manner how, when the Duke was appointed to the governorship of Provence, a book was hawked about the streets—in the usual manner of publishing—entitled, "The Great Deeds, Brilliant Acts and Bravery" ("*hauts-faits, gestes et vaillances*") "of M. d'Épernon on his Road to Provence." It was handsomely bound and the title was beautifully stamped in gold on the cover, but the purchasers discovered on opening it that all the pages were blank and contained—Nothing !

At Brignolles, in Provence, where he had also made himself hated by his insolence and cruelties, the inhabitants undermined his residence with a view to its falling in and crushing him, and a miracle alone saved

him. At Angoulême, the Mayor went with some troops to arrest him for having quitted Loches, to which he had been exiled from Paris by order of Henri, and he only saved himself by flying to another room by a private staircase. As he did so, however, the whole of the structure gave way beneath him, it having been prepared for his destruction, which would certainly have taken place had he not sped over it so quickly in his flight.*

Enough has now been told of the character of the worst man of any prominence in France at the time of the assassination of Henri IV., but before we proceed to discuss the remarkable series of schemes and plots by which that unfortunate monarch was surrounded at the time of his death, it is not inadvisable to narrate the miseries that righteously fell on d'Épernon ere he died at an advanced age (eighty-eight).

He had long outlived the other detestable *mignons*, Quélus, Saint-Mésgrin, Maugiron and Joyeuse. He had seen his children die before him; he had been present at the marriage of his second son with the daughter of Henriette d'Entragues, and had witnessed that son strike his future wife in the face before all the Court ere the betrothal was signed, and he was to

* L'Estoile. "*Rencontre du Duc d'Épernon et Ravaillac aux enfers.*" De Bury. *Mémoires*, Sully. *Mémoires*, Maréchal de Bouillon. D'Aubigné.

learn, four years later, that the ruffian had poisoned her at last. Truly, if heaven ever exacts an earthly vengeance, it did so from the wretched father of the bridegroom and the mother of the bride, both of whom had, in earlier years, been two of the most evil people in France, even if they were not two of the principals in a plot to murder the best King—as a King—that France ever possessed.

One good act d'Épernon may, or, rather, might be credited with, if the suspicion did not force itself upon our minds that, in performing it, he was gratifying more his spite against Louis XIII. than endeavouring to help a cruelly-treated woman. He lent his assistance in aid of the escape of Marie de Médici from the Château de Blois, to which she had been consigned for life by her son, although at first he tried hard to excuse himself from doing so. Reflection, however, caused d'Épernon to recognize the fact that, not only would the escape of the Queen-mother cause bitter mortification to the King who had long since discarded him, but, which would be more gratifying to his own rancour, to the favourite, de Luynes, who was responsible for the fact that Marie had ever been sent away from Paris and incarcerated at Blois. For d'Épernon had himself once been a favourite, and, naturally, all favourites who succeeded him were obnoxious. But there were other

grievances to be arranged. Louis had ordered him, when he came to pay his respects, to appear unaccompanied by the eight hundred lances who were his usual escort, since the King said that they were totally unnecessary for a "servitor," and de Luynes had successfully used all his influence to prevent d'Épernon's third son, the Archbishop of Toulouse, from obtaining the Cardinal's hat.

Nevertheless, the Duke hesitated to help Marie. He had steeped his hands sufficiently in treachery, and he was far from considering it wise to be again involved in further treason; nor would he have consented to aid Marie—whose name had once been coupled with his in an unfavourable, though an entirely false, manner—had not two of his sons, the Marquis de la Valette and the Archbishop of Toulouse, persuaded him to do so. The prelate was burning with rage at the refusal of the hat, and the Marquis was a true son of his father. Yet still he wavered, in spite of a touching letter which Marie had sent him; and doubtless he would have altogether refused to help her, had not a scheming abbé named Ruccelaï, a Florentine and a creature of Concini, brought a pressure to bear upon him from which he saw no way of escaping except by consenting to lend his aid in the evasion of the unhappy Queen. This man, Ruccelaï, was one of those harpies

who, even in those days, was a disgrace to his calling; a terror to women whom he blackmailed and a pander to those from whom he expected patronage. He had, however, refined tastes; his table was of the most delicate nature; he squandered the money he knew how to obtain easily; he was full of artistic ideas, and he boasted that even the Queen had looked on him with favourable eyes. This was undoubtedly a lie, yet it was to him that Marie first suggested that assistance should be found to aid her in her escape from Blois.

The abbé at once embraced the idea. Bassompierre (who, as popular favourite and *ami de femmes* received information from his brother courtiers, and, also, many strange whispers from his fair friends) says that Ruccelaï, with the view of leaving Paris without causing remark, denounced himself anonymously to the Court so that he should be openly driven from it. The ruse succeeded, and he was ordered to retire to his parish of Ligny near Sédan, which was the very thing he desired to do. Remembering, however, that he had once outwitted d'Épernon in a quarrel with the latter's nephew, whose side the Duke had espoused, he sent some of his Italian friends to confer with the Marquis de la Valette and the Archbishop of Toulouse. Their father being resolute to have nothing to do with Ruccelaï,

the abbé caused d'Épernon to be informed that he held in his hands enough proof of some of his later treacheries to Louis XIII. to send him to the block, and d'Épernon, who knew that the boast was most probably founded on fact, at once consented to meet him.

With the successful escape of the Queen from Blois these pages are not concerned, but as many historians, including Voltaire, who could twist history to his own purposes as well as any writer, have claimed much credit for the Duc d'Épernon in this matter, it has been mentioned here. It may also be remarked that Ruccelaï divided a hundred thousand crowns (twelve thousand pounds of English money of that day and nearly fifty thousand pounds of our time) between the Duc de Bouillon and the Duc d'Épernon. The sum was obtained from the sale of much of the Queen's jewellery, and was taken, at least as regards d'Épernon's share, for the ostensible reason of providing more troops to protect Metz against the attacks of the Austrians and Spaniards.

* * * * * *

Catherine Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues,* one of

* The name of this family was for over a hundred years spelt in different ways. In the time of Henri IV. it was almost universally written as above, and I have preferred to follow the custom of Henriette's period. It is to be also remarked that neither the "Catherine" nor the "de Balzac" was used by those who write of her, or by herself, except in legal documents. As Henriette d'Entragues she exists for posterity and, as that, I, therefore, speak of her.

the persons upon whom has rested for exactly three centuries the evil reputation of being concerned in a Court conspiracy to slay Henri IV.—out of revenge for his having broken his promise to marry her—was the daughter of François de Balzac, Seigneur d'Entragues and Governor of Orléans, and of Marie Touchet, who had been both nurse and mistress to Charles IX. Although Sully states that Gabrielle was not absolutely beautiful, but could only lay claim to being a pretty woman, Henriette has been spoken of as inferior to her in good looks.* She was, however, slight and well-made, extremely distinguished-looking, and possessed of a superb figure. Her mouth was small, but hard and determined; her glance commanding and authoritative; pride and contempt for others being the characteristics most strongly expressed on her face. Nor were these traits belied by her nature. Few, except those of the highest rank, came before her who were not made to feel that she regarded them as utterly insignificant, and it was often suggested in connection with her that, whenever a conceited man or woman over-estimated any qualities he or she possessed, they

* The remarkable dissimilarity between the portraits in this work and the description of those whom they are intended to represent, cannot fail to be noticed. Yet the former are the works of leading artists of the period, and the descriptions are taken from the best contemporary authors.

should be brought face to face with Henriette d'Entragues, after which they would probably retire with their self-estimation very considerably reduced, if not shattered.

It was not long after the death of Gabrielle—which at first he mourned so bitterly!—that Henri, overhearing some of his friends and courtiers (including Bassompierre, who hints that the conversation was arranged for his, or, rather, Henriette's benefit) speaking of the lady's beauty, expressed a desire to see her. From the moment he did so the usual spark was struck in his bosom and he laid siege to her, while probably imagining that it would be the same in his case as it generally is with kings, "who rarely sue in vain." In one particular he undoubtedly judged aright. Henriette was as willing to be wooed and won as Henri was to woo and win, but, ere she was satisfied to accept the King's love, she was desirous of knowing what the reward was likely to be for the acceptance of it. She had not forgotten, as none in all but the most remote parts of France had forgotten, provided they ever knew, that nothing but the sudden death of Gabrielle could have prevented her from becoming Queen, since the Pope had, at the last moment of her life, announced his willingness to divorce Henri from Marguerite de Valois, whether she consented or not, and thus provide France

with an already existing heir in the shape of the Duc de Vendôme. Now, therefore, that Henriette was likely to take the place of the late favourite, she was resolved that she would also, at the same time, fall heir to the splendid position which that favourite would have obtained had she lived. Consequently, she angled for the King's capture with all the astuteness of the most worldly coquette, and the more strongly her lover carried on the siege the more cleverly did she repulse him. Whenever Henri proposed a visit to her father's house she met him, apparently casually, with a disappointed and woebegone air, and stated that her parents were so opposed to his Majesty's pursuit of her that it was impossible to accord him even the shortest of interviews, but, at the same period, since her business aptitudes were always considerable, she accepted a gift of a hundred thousand crowns from her impetuous admirer!

The gift was, however, but a drop in the ocean in comparison with that which she intended to obtain eventually, but recognizing that a man of the King's temperament might not be always disposed to continue distributing such platonic *largesse*, she had recourse to a scheme to ensure her future in which she was aided by her mother and father, the former of whom had had considerable experience of a very similar affair.

Consequently, she announced that, short of Henri giving her a written promise of marriage, which marriage should take place the moment the Pope had carried out his promise and divorced him from Marguerite, her parents would separate her from him for ever.

It is, perhaps, needless to say that the written promise already referred to in these pages was given with the best will in the world. Before, however, it was handed to the astute young lady, Henri—who rarely did anything of importance without consulting Sully or without telling him afterwards of what he had already done—showed him the contract he had written. Sully (who was at this time Baron de Rosny, his dukedom being yet to come), read the paper in silence and then returned it to his master, who naturally remonstrated with him on his manner. On this, the Minister exclaimed several times, "You will marry her! You will marry her!" and, on the King indicating that such was his undoubted intention, Sully took the paper back (as has been told) and tore it into pieces. "You are mad! You are a fool!" Henri cried, even his easy nature being aroused at last, whereupon Sully, with his usual rough brusquerie, exclaimed, "It is true, sire, yet I wish to Heaven I were the only one in France." The finale to his episode (as has also been told) was that

Henri picked up the pieces of paper, retired into his private room and, putting them together, made a fresh copy of the promise of marriage, which copy he shortly afterwards handed to Henriette, whom, a little later, he created Marquise de Verneuil.

From this time forward until his death Henri was, more or less, in the toils of his astute *Favorite déclarée*, and that in spite of the fact that he had married Marie de Médici. At the same time he was, however, by no means averse to indulging in a little diplomacy on his own part which preserved the peace between them for a certain time. Henriette having retired to inspect the property which she had acquired with her title, was kept in total ignorance that negotiations were in hand for bringing about his marriage with Marie de Médici, but when she did learn how she had been hoodwinked her rage was terrible. It was, however, ineffectual. She had gone to Lyons to receive the banners recently captured by Henri from the troops of the Duke of Savoy, and, though she was flattered by this openly expressed homage, she refused to remain a moment longer in the city after she heard that the marriage with *la grosse banquière*, as she termed the future queen, was imminent. When, at last, she consented to see the King she treated him to such a torrent of vituperation that even his easy temper was scarcely

proof against her fury. Henriette, in addition to the above appellation, now commenced to use, and to continue to use, the most offensive terms her vocabulary could supply. She spoke of herself as the queen—by written promise—and of the Queen in the worst manner—namely, as what she was herself; her son was truly the dauphin, she said, and the Dauphin what her own son actually was; and she refused to let that son be nursed and brought up with the Dauphin on the plea that the legal one to whom she had given birth could not associate with the son of the Florentine mistress.

Henri bore it well for a long time, while doubtless remembering that whatever he had to endure was due to his own failings; but at last he retaliated. The continual questions about his *banquière*—a double shaft at one of the commercial pursuits of the Médicis as well as at the money which Marie had brought him—roused him eventually. To a repeated question of when *la grosse banquière* would return to the Court from Fontainebleau, he retaliated, "When I have swept all the improper women out of it."

Henriette's first attempt to insult the Queen had been at the moment when Marie, on arriving in Paris, had requested that all the ladies of the Court should be presented to her. Among them was Henriette, who was introduced by the Duchesse de Nemours. Henri,

however, possibly with a view to avoiding unpleasant questions and complications in the future, and in a manner which shows as plainly as anything can show what the state of society was at that time, exclaimed to his newly-made wife as the presentation of Henriette was made, "*Celle-ci a été ma maîtresse,*" a startling piece of information which Marie received with a chilly stare at the handsome beauty and Henriette with an air of utter indifference. A moment later, since it was necessary that the *débutantes* should bend low and, lifting the hem of the Queen's robe, kiss it, Henriette, scarcely bending at all from her considerable height, grasped the dress close by the Queen's knee and roughly lifted it towards her lips. Henri was not, however, disposed to see this slight put upon his newly-made wife and, seizing the other's hand, forced it to the hem of the robe and compelled his mistress to perform her part properly.

These incidents created, as was natural enough, considerable sensation. Almost every writer of the period has left an account of them on record, and all the ambassadors mentioned them to their governments in their next despatches.

As she had begun when Henriette d'Entragues, so she continued when Marquise de Verneuil. She was, indeed, the poison of the unfortunate Queen's life,

though, in administering the draught, she did not escape from swallowing some of the drops herself. She showed the promise of marriage from Henri to everyone who would take the trouble to look at it until, at last, she became almost a laughing-stock; and, had she not possessed within her a strong power for evil, would have ended by becoming one. Later, however, when she finally recognized that, do what she might, the Queen would always be the Queen and she nothing but the favourite, she informed the King that she intended to leave France with her children and take up her abode in England; whereupon Henri, tired of the handsome virago's frequent outbreaks, if not of her charms, consented to her doing so. He also saw in this suggestion the long desired opportunity for obtaining possession of the much exhibited promise of marriage, and, consequently, would only give his permission for Henriette to depart out of France on condition that she restored it to him. She, on her part, was equal to the occasion and, seeing in the transaction a chance of gratifying her unfailing cupidity, demanded twenty thousand crowns and the promise of the rank of a marshal for her father in exchange for the paper. The money was paid, and the promise given, with an alacrity that was little flattering to her feelings.

The Marquise had, however, no intention whatever

of exiling herself, and, as she no longer had any tangible claim on her lover, she next conceived the design of a treasonable plot to slay the King and the Dauphin and put her own son on the throne; and in this plot she involved her father and her half-brother, the Comte d'Auvergne—a son of her mother and Charles IX.

The plot was suggested to England (!) and Spain, it is said, but James I.—who hated bloodshed where kings were concerned—instantly exposed it to Henri with the result that Henriette found herself a prisoner in her own house under the charge of the Captain of the Watch, while, always bold and defiant, she rejected an offer of pardon made by Henri on the ground that she knew nothing whatever of the scheme, and that, where there was no sin, a pardon was unnecessary. She also refused to appear before the Commissioners appointed to examine her and her brother on the ground that she had recently been bled (a custom indulged in with great regularity by the upper classes at this period and for long afterwards), but, in actual fact, because she was anxious to know how the Comte d'Auvergne had comported himself during his examination. The manner in which he had done so was by betraying her as the head of the conspiracy, and, when the Marquise heard this, she informed the King that the only demand

she required him to grant was " A rope for her brother, a pardon for her father, and justice for herself." The latter request was by no means acceded to, or, at least, was much perverted, since she obtained something very different from what she deserved. After being detained at the Abbey of Beaumont-les-Tours, where she was treated with every indulgence, she was fully pardoned and, a little while afterwards, had again ensnared the King in her toils. From these he only escaped occasionally by transferring his affections to several other ladies in succession. Her father and brother were condemned to death, but, beyond being detained for some time, suffered no other punishment.

This was the first attempt at treason on the part of La Marquise de Verneuil, but we shall see later that, if it was her last, her powers of intrigue, treachery and womanly spite have been much overrated.

Henriette was still a young woman at the time of this conspiracy, and was, indeed, but twenty-seven at the time of the assassination of Henri. But her tempestuous passions had aged her before her time and she had become a self-indulgent woman, fond of the table and good cheer. She was also a bitterly disappointed one, since, after Gabrielle had so nearly approached the throne that nothing but her death prevented her from ascending it, Henriette had every reason to suppose

that, with the written promise of marriage in her pocket, she would undoubtedly do so in her place. For, when Gabrielle died and Henriette became almost immediately her successor, Henri was not looking out for a wealthy bride, and it was in the power of the latter, as it had been in that of the former, to so enthral him that, in spite of his necessities and lack of money, he would never have thought of doing so. That she should, therefore, have become " yellow and thin "—it was the victory of the wife over the mistress that the King should have used these very words about the latter when writing to the former !—that she should have become fat and enormous—*la grosse banquière* was at last avenged !—and that, finally, she should have nothing to think of but her meals, which she loved, is, consequently, not to be wondered at.*

But if the high feeding in which she indulged made her gross, there was a reason which, earlier, might well have made her yellow and thin. The grossness came after the death of Henri, the latter before it. For a long time she lived under the apprehension that the Queen intended to have her made away with, a fear which, remembering how poison was freely administered to rivals and enemies in those days, and remembering

* The latter part of the description of La Marquise de Verneuil is that of Tallemant des Réaux. He knew much—and he was not one to curb his pen !

also the reputation borne by the de Médicis in connection with the art of poisoning, was not unreasonable.

In any case, there was a strong rumour over all Paris that Henriette had gone too far and that, though the Queen might have tolerated a well-concealed *affaire* with her husband, she could not endure the other woman's open insolence. Once Marie had been heard to cry out that the "creature" had no other aim in life but to torture her and plunge her into continued sorrow, and she had concluded by saying that, at the right time, she would avenge herself. She was also known to have written to her uncle, the Grand Duke, in a similar strain, but she received only cold comfort from him. It was the habit of this astute and ease-loving personage to invariably endeavour to calm the distracted feelings of his niece and to reconcile her to what he was pleased to deem nothing more than small domestic worries. The manner in which he did so was a peculiar, as well as a diplomatic, one. He would write to Marie reminding her that he had made her Queen of the—at the moment—most powerful country in Europe, when he might, on the contrary, have consigned her to an obscure position in Portugal, or to a third-rate Italian duchy; and he generally concluded his epistles by telling her that he was thoroughly annoyed with her—to which he occasionally added that he was

also thoroughly ashamed of her peevish complaints. The Queen, in consequence, got little sympathy from her uncle on this occasion, nor was it very probable that she would ever do so. Such a trifle as a mistress in a Court over which Marie reigned supreme, after her husband, would probably appear to him no more worthy of serious notice than a leaf which had blown across her face as she took her daily walk in the gardens of the Tuileries would be.

Nevertheless, as Richelieu states—and he was at this time watching everything that occurred with a hawk-like eye !—the matter was considered to be grave. The Queen, of whom Henriette spoke as " a woman of vindictive Florentine blood," was causing the latter to be shadowed in every movement, while Henriette was so afraid that she would shortly be openly insulted by Marie and held up to the contempt of everyone at Court, that she refrained from attending it.

At the same time, Henri received several anonymous communications to the effect that the life of his mistress was in serious danger of being cut short, and—although Richelieu astutely hints that the information came from the Queen, who considered this the best method of frightening her rival out of the city—they at least struck terror to the hearts of the King and Henriette. If the intention of the writer had been to drive the

HENRIETTE DE BALZAC D'ENTRAGUES
Qu'elle passe en beauté les plus belles de France,
Qu'elle gaigne le cœur d'vn Prince nom-pareil,
Et qu'oncques nul ennuy ne rompe son sommeil.
Ainsi dit le destin le iour de ta naissance.
Thc. de Leu-fe. Quenes. pin.

HENRIETTE DE BALZAC D'ENTRAGUES
(Marquise de Verneuil).

[*Facing p.* 186

already terrified woman from Paris it undoubtedly succeeded admirably. Henri sent her off accompanied by a considerable body of troops and peace was established at the Louvre for some time.

Meanwhile, the appellation by which Henri had been pleased to introduce Henriette to the Queen never ceased to belong to her; instead of saying "*celle-ci a été*," he should have said "*celle-ci est.*" She never utterly lost the position she held towards him at that time, although she shared the honour with several other ladies, and although she was concerned in, or, at least, was well acquainted with, all the plots laid against his life.*

On the death of Henri, Henriette put forth a claim to a pension, and, either because Louis XIII. had not then developed the extreme prudery which was afterwards so conspicuous in him—a remarkable contrast to his father, son and great-great-grandson! †—or because he had not then developed the somewhat parsimonious habits which took possession of him in his later days, she obtained one., His Majesty allowed her a grant for life of three thousand crowns, so that, with what she had earlier obtained from Henri, she was well provided for.

* *Mémoires*, Bassompierre, Richelieu, Montglat and Cardinal Borghese.

† Louis XV., great-grandson of Louis XIV.

In this and the preceding sketches an attempt has been made to depict only those who were the leading persons in Paris at the time of the murder of Henri IV. —there were not many who towered immensely above the others—but there are still a number of pawns in the game who have yet to play their parts. Ravaillac, who struck the blows that killed the King, has to be brought before the reader's notice later on; but Ravaillac was in no way connected with those who have been described. A man who was so poor at the time that, a day or so before he did the deed, he stood hat in hand outside a church door begging for alms, and who stole the knife with which he slew the King either from off a butcher's block or from the miserable tavern wherein he harboured, would have no part or parcel with the leading personages of France. Nor would a woman yet to be mentioned, one who was wild and wanton and depraved, it is said, and a discarded lady's maid—yet still one who, hearing of a plot to slay Henri, nobly sacrificed her freedom for ever and risked sacrificing her existence—have any more place amongst them than had the assassin himself. And there were yet others concerned in the various endeavours to deprive the King of his life. Nobles who hated Henri for having defeated them in the great game of war, for having obtained a throne from which they had

striven their utmost to keep him; women, too, some of high rank, who had been passed over or flung aside by Henri when intoxicated with the charms of Gabrielle d'Estrées or Henriette d'Entragues; discarded soldiers and men of broken fortunes, Jesuits, spies of Spain, Austria, Italy and other countries—and many more.

But to bring, as carefully as can be, a clear picture before the eyes of those into whose hands these pages may chance to fall, it will shortly become necessary for the subject to cease to be of a biographical nature and to assume the form of a narrative, while special care has to be taken to prevent the deed of Ravaillac from being blended with a plot conceived in circles to which he could never have obtained admission. Great care has, indeed, to be taken to dispel—even if it can be dispelled!—the idea which has for long years held possession of readers and students, namely, that Ravaillac was but a weapon in the hands of those far above him, and that, when he struck the King to the heart, he but did so at the instigation of d'Épernon, the Marquise de Verneuil, one or two other cast-off mistresses of Henri, and—as some have ventured to hint—of the Queen herself. For Ravaillac, the fanatic, the seer of visions, the wretched, provincial schoolmaster, had no more connection with the wealthy and highly-placed

men and women of Henri's Court than he had with Philip II. of Spain, who was hiring murderers right and left to assassinate all prominent Protestants; or than he had with the lurking assassins and cut-throats who hid in the slums of Paris ready to hire out their daggers to any who would pay their services with a handful of silver; or with the French fugitives who had fled to Milan or Florence or Naples, but were willing to risk returning to Paris when the hour they awaited was at hand and when the wherewithal for the cost of their journey across the Alps was forthcoming.

In fine, d'Épernon and his associates knew nothing of Ravaillac or his diseased mind and hideous determinations, and Ravaillac knew nothing of the fact that an envious and furious nobleman had banded himself with some envenomed and embittered women to send the ruler of France to his tomb. Ravaillac could not see, or anticipate, that on the day he struck the blow other assassins were ready and lurking near the King's route prepared to do the deed themselves; the Court plotters could not see, or anticipate, that, ere their intentions could be carried out, a beggar in the streets would have done the work they had paid their hirelings to perform.

D'Épernon lived to find himself utterly discredited at Court; ignored by the successor of the King he so

hated, flouted by the greatest Minister—Richelieu—that France has ever known, jeered at by the populace and despised by all. Voltaire quotes a story, often told before his day, of the manner in which d'Épernon endeavoured to appear indifferent to the treatment that was now his portion. Descending the great staircase of the Louvre he met Richelieu ascending it, and, on the Cardinal asking indifferently if there was anything new taking place, d'Épernon replied, "Nothing, except that, as you see, I am going down and you are going up." It is the only witticism ever attributed to him, and it would have been well if his memory could have been charged with more of such humorous sallies and with less crimes and brutalities.* It does not, indeed, appear that, devoted to treachery as he was, he was ever a traitor to Henri III. but he had still other desires which he lost no opportunity of gratifying. His insatiable greed was never slaked, nor did he intend that it should be. Beside the wealth, possessions and high offices he obtained from him whom he served, he induced his first master to persuade the sister of Queen Louise to become engaged to him, and he passed his softer hours in endeavouring to win the affections of any young Spanish ladies of position who happened to be of the Court circle, so that, when he

* *La Vie du Duc d'Éspernon, par Girard, son secrétaire.*

had them in his power, he could force them to divulge the secret intentions of Spain concerning France under Henri III., and its future action against the man who would almost of a certainty become Henri IV.

Finally, he died a miserable old man and, as his sons left no successors, the name of d'Épernon, as connected with him, became blotted out of the records of France.

Note.—The Elizabethan dramatist, George Chapman (1559–1634), produced in 1613, a drama founded on the career of d'Épernon. It is powerful but inaccurate. Chapman was too close a contemporary of d'Épernon to have learnt all that there was to be known about him.

CHAPTER V

THE CRIME

IT has already been suggested that, perhaps, no man who ever lived before or since his time saw more clearly that his end would be a violent one than did Henri IV. It is, however, probable that, at first, when he was struggling to maintain his hold on the remnant of his own poor little country of Navarre, which Spain, if not France, was always endeavouring to wrench away from him and incorporate in her own vast domains, he did not imagine that the violence of his death would take place in any other manner than that which no brave soldier fears to meet, namely, in the field. There was, at that time, no reason for the assassin to ply his horrible trade. It is true that Henri was a Protestant, a person the most detested of all people in the greater part of Europe, and doubly so when, either as man or woman, he or she sat upon a throne. Elizabeth was the greatest monarch in Europe and a Protestant, and every schoolboy knows to what she was exposed and

from what she escaped, only by her own force of character, her lion-like bravery and her capacity for inspiring awe in all beneath her, and especially in those who sought to harm her.* So, too, was William the Silent, Prince of Orange, a Protestant, and he fell by the bullets of Balthazar Gerard, while there were some rulers of petty German States who had embraced that Faith but had escaped the destiny that found others greater than they, and the same may be said of James I., who, as James of Scotland, was the first Protestant King of that country. With Henri his obscurity, while only the ruler of a small State, was his security. There was little need to murder him; if he escaped bullet and swordthrust in the many *mêlées* in which he was continually concerned—as it was far from likely

* One of the least known instances of these attempts was that of a young Scotchwoman whose husband had died of grief on hearing of the death of Mary, Queen of Scots, and who made her way to Elizabeth's Court, determined to assassinate her. In the crowd of courtiers one of the pistols with which she was armed fell to the floor, and she was instantly seized upon. Elizabeth, after regarding her coldly for a moment, said: "You considered it your duty to slay me; what do you now suppose is my duty towards you?" "Is it as Queen or judge that you ask me this?" the culprit demanded boldly. "As Queen," Elizabeth replied. "Then as a woman to a woman you should grant me grace," the other said. "How shall I know you will not again attempt my life?" queried Elizabeth. "Madam," the prisoner replied, "a grace accorded with such precaution is no grace. You had best treat me as though you were a judge." "Go, you are free," the Queen said now, while, turning to her courtiers, she exclaimed: "I have received the best lesson I have ever learnt in the thirty years that I have reigned."

he would do—then there were powers who, either single-handed or combined, could at last deprive him of his original throne at the time when they considered he had been long enough an obstacle in their way.

If, however, Henri had never supposed that a violent death would be his portion in any other shape or form than that of a soldier's fate, he was undeceived from the moment when he, following his mother, Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre in her own right,* arrived in Paris in 1572 to espouse Marguerite de Valois, between whom and him a marriage had been discussed and arranged by their relatives from the time he was a boy. This union was projected for more reasons than one, the principal being that, thereby, Navarre would become an appanage of the French crown, if not an integral portion of France, instead of falling into the ever-grasping hands of Philip II. of Spain. Yet, in the

* Pèréfixe, Archbishop of Paris, states, in his *Histoire de Henri le Grand*, that Henri had great good fortune in finding the French crown devolve on him, as there had never been in any hereditary State a succession more remote, there being, at one time, ten or eleven degrees of separation between him and his predecessor, Henri III. When he was born, the Archbishop also remarks, there were nine princes of the blood before him, viz., Henri II. and his five sons; Henri's own father, Antoine, King of Navarre by marriage with his mother, and two elder brothers of his own. Every one of them died before the succession, if not the immediate possession, was open to him. The two brothers were infants who died before Henri was born, but it is to be observed that Pèréfixe is himself uncertain as to whether the total count was nine, ten or eleven.

heart of the unscrupulous Catherine de Médici, who had the principal part in bringing about the marriage, there was still another reason, though one that was distasteful to her. Two of her sons, François II. and Charles IX.—who was still living—had sat on the throne, but to neither of them had a son been vouchsafed. François II., dying at the age of seventeen, had been accorded no heir by Mary, Queen of Scots, whose first husband he was; and Charles, who had always been peculiar and early gave signs of the madness which seized upon him after he had consented to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, was married to Elizabeth, daughter of the Emperor Maximilian II., but had no lawful children. To him, therefore, would succeed Henri III. (at this time Duc d'Anjou and shortly to be elected King of Poland); and though he would doubtless marry—as he eventually did—his habits of life, his unspeakable depravity and his miserable frame scarcely seemed to promise that from him would spring a successor to the throne of his ancestors. With him and the Duc d'Alençon* gone, there would be none to assume that throne but Henri de Bourbon, a Protestant and head of the fifth branch of that still more ancient race, the Capets, from whom both Valois and

* He died 1584. He was the youngest surviving son of Henry II. and Catherine de Médici, a fifth having died in infancy.

Bourbons deduced their royalty and their rights to the crown of France.

This—the disappearance of all those whom Catherine de Médici, after ten years of childlessness, had provided as heirs to that crown, coupled with the fact that they themselves could leave no heirs behind—was gall and wormwood to her dark and gloomy soul. She loathed Protestantism—she was the prime instigator of the impending massacre (*i.e.*, 1572); yet here, in Paris, was the only man who appeared likely ever to sit firmly on the French throne; he who was a Protestant, a Huguenot! With the above-mentioned views concerning Navarre she had, therefore, arranged the marriage of her daughter Marguerite with this Protestant, yet it is scarcely possible that, later, the fact had escaped her mind that, with all her sons either dead or childless, and with Marguerite married to Henri of Navarre, the young Princess stood a great chance of becoming Queen of France and bearing a son, who, in time, would himself become the King. Thus, in one way, the race of Valois would be perpetuated, and she, who was the wife of one king and the mother of three kings, would become also the grandmother of another.* The marriage, a loveless one, a *mariage de convenance* in the

* Marguerite de Valois rivalled, and did, indeed, outstrip her mother in this particular. For she was the daughter of a king, sister of three kings and the wife of a fifth.

strictest sense, took place but two or three days before the Massacre itself, and since it was decided that every Protestant in Paris (and France, if possible) should be slaughtered, it was not intended that Henri de Navarre should be spared. Yet Marguerite de Valois, who not only had no love for him—she was at the moment deeply in love with the Duc de Guise!—but, also, no liking for him, learnt that there was no intention of sparing her husband and, by keeping him in the apartments allotted to them in the Louvre, undoubtedly saved his life. It is also far from likely that she was unaware of the suspicions directed against Catherine de Médici concerning the sudden death of his mother, and, if such were the case, she would know well enough that it was not probable that the son would be treated more mercifully at this time.

This was the first actual attempt, or plot, to assassinate Henri, and, between it and the time when that of Ravaillac succeeded, seventeen more were to intervene. It is not, therefore, strange that he should at last come to regard a violent death in the future as likely to be as much due to assassination as to the chances of war.

It is, indeed, certain that such was the case, and that, as the years passed, he apprehended murder far more than he had ever apprehended death in any other form.

As, however, the days went on and one attempt after another failed, it is not improbable that the sense of apprehension became dulled, and there was little exhibition of its existence until the time drew near for the last one to succeed. It has been mentioned that he ignored the reports repeated to him by his son, the Duc de Vendôme, and that but a few hours later he was dead. Yet, indifferent as he might be, he could not help recognizing that there was abroad in the minds of all his subjects a feeling of certainty that he was a doomed man. And his discernment, which was considerable, could not fail to tell him that this feeling would never have become so general if, amongst all who possessed it and expressed it, there were not some who knew only too well what was in the wind. When Henri cried out to Sully, as he did more than once, "*Pardieu!* I shall die in this town; they will kill me," he was but uttering words of the truth of which he had a full conviction.

He uttered, however, still more strange expressions which go far to justify the suspicions many of his people then formed, and continued to hold long afterwards, that his wife was at the head of some conspiracy against him. She had been most eager that he should let her be crowned Queen and had complained again and again that that sacred rite had never taken place; that since

he was once more going to take the field (shortly before his death) it was a duty to her and to the Dauphin that it should do so at once, since, if he were slain, the *États-généraux* would never consent to make her Queen-Regent or guardian to the boy, Louis, without it having been performed. This latter reason was, undoubtedly, the true one; the cause of her desire. No woman in her position would be willing to see herself suddenly sink from the rank of Queen-Consort to a cipher; no mother would wish to lose all hold upon the direction and bringing-up of a son who was but nine years of age, and still less so a mother whose son was at that age King of a great country. Yet more than half, more than three-quarters, of the French people refused to regard matters in this light, and they justified their belief by recalling the fact that the truculent d'Épernon strode into the Council Chamber a day after Henri's death, and, laying his hand upon his sword, threatened the Council with internal warfare if Marie was not elected Regent and guardian of Louis.

Yet this action should, in point of fact, have conduced more to clear Marie de Médici in the eyes of the public than to render that public suspicious of her. For if such violence on the part of d'Épernon was necessary, of what use was the consecration in St. Denis two days before; what benefit had it conferred on her that the

upstart duke would not have obtained for her without it ? The country was plunged in misery after the long wars in which it had been engaged at home and abroad, and by the terrible taxation necessary to support those wars. Henri's hope that the day would come when every peasant would have a fowl in his *pot-au-feu* was more remote from likelihood than had, perhaps, been the case for centuries. If, therefore, d'Épernon forced on another civil war, as he had the power to do, ruin would fall on France and she would be at the mercy of her two great enemies, Spain and Austria. Consequently, the Council, knowing all this, had no other course but to yield and it yielded, though in doing so it outstepped the Law, which was that, when a Regent had to be elected, he or she should be so elected by the *États-généraux*. Where, therefore, was there any proof that, in demanding her coronation, Marie had, amongst other things, some sinister ideas of a plot against her husband's life ; where was there any connection between d'Épernon's authoritative behaviour and the performance of a deeply solemn, religious ceremony to which every Queen-Consort was entitled, and to which she was by right entitled from the moment her marriage had taken place ? Yet Marie had been married to Henri for ten years, he being King of France at the time of that marriage, and the ceremony had never been

accorded her, nor, if Henri had been able to have his own way, would it have ever occurred.*

For, in a somewhat similar manner to those three-fourths of his people, though in still a different one, he, too, saw something threatening in the consecration. But the people drew ominous deductions after his murder from its having taken place; Henri drew terrible forebodings from the fact that Marie was pressing him for its performance, and from his belief that, once it did take place, the ceremony would bring evil to him.

"*Ce maudit sacre!*" he exclaimed, using a strange combination of words in connection with such a function, "will be my ruin, my death." "It will bring me to my end," he said to Sully again and again, while to Marie he pleaded that the expense would be enormous, that it was unnecessary, that she had done well enough without it for ten years—anything, indeed, that he thought might induce her to forego her desire.

Marie prevailed, however, and, since the murder of Henri did actually follow swiftly after the ceremony, it is nothing short of extraordinary that what cannot

* Henri was from the first much against Marie's coronation, saying that it would bring him ill-luck. Yet he joked with her afterwards about it—for one day!—calling her "Madame la Régente," and pretending to take orders from her, and, as she returned from St. Denis, flicking drops of water on her from the balcony upon which he stood.

be described as aught else but a prescience or premonition of ill-fortune should have been accorded him. Or—is it possible that, to him, there had been conveyed a more tangible, if less superstitious, warning? Is it possible that, from among those in Paris who had, beyond all doubt, become possessed of the knowledge that harm was intended him, one, if not more, had spoken, or rather written, plainly, and that Henri (while finding in what was, doubtless, an anonymous letter something that bore the appearance, if not the certainty, of truth), recognized that his correspondent was neither writing with a view to payment nor to terrify or cajole him? And did he also, understanding all this, lock the secret up in his own breast, or only come near to revealing it by his exclamations to Sully and by his reluctance to quit his wife's side and go forth day by day, not knowing on which the blow would fall?

As a matter of fact, there was more than one person in Paris who could have revealed to the doomed man the certainty that he was marked for death; yet, strangely enough, while one of those persons could have testified that a plot was laid which should engulf him, there were others, there was, at least, one other, who, working as stealthily as a mole works, was—all unknown to whatever conspirators might exist, and unknown even to himself—to mar that plot.

It is necessary, therefore, to now proceed to examine who there was out of the whole population of Paris who knew, as after events showed, what was in hand, and, even if no information was given to Henri, was at least capable of giving it to others nearly connected with him.

There was in the Capital at this time a woman about whom—although the facts of her existence and position were well known, and have been handed down to later times—exceedingly diverse accounts have been given. Her name was Jacqueline le Voyer, and she came from a small village named Orfin, near Épernon, from which the Duc took his title. She had very early in her life married a man who had once been a simple soldier in the King's Guards, but had, later, followed the more lucrative trade of a spy. His name was Isaac de Varennes, he being also le Sieur d'Escoman, or Comans. He and his wife lived unhappily together and soon separated, and Jacqueline le Voyer proceeded to Paris with the idea of obtaining a position of maid-of-honour, companion, or even lady's-maid to some woman of good position. Thus far all accounts agree, but from this point they differ widely. Those most against her state that she was lame and hump-backed—defects which merited pity !—and also possessed a bitter tongue and an evil temper, while they add that she managed to exist by

making herself useful to many of the *grandes dames* of Paris as an intermediary between them and their admirers. On the other hand, those who speak more favourably of her state that, in spite of her physical misfortunes, she was not of unpleasing appearance and, though somewhat harsh and querulous, was ordinarily gentle and well-behaved, and also that, instead of following a contemptible occupation, she had once been maid-of-honour to Marguerite de Valois —now growing old and very charitable to the poor— and had sought to become maid-of-honour to the Queen.

No matter, however, which account is right or which is wrong, Jacqueline le Voyer possessed a valiant nature, as will be soon apparent.

For some months before the death of Henri she had been spoken of as a woman who was uttering strange statements and spreading false, or improbable, reports as to attempts about to be made upon the King's life, while, in doing so, she had not scrupled to connect with these attempts the name of the Duc d'Épernon—from whose neighbourhood, it will have been seen, she came— and that of Henriette d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil, with whom she was said to have lived as companion or maid. By some she was described as *une folle ;* by others as a woman embittered by her lack of ordinary

good-looks and, consequently, harsh-tongued and given to scandal, and also as one who was enraged at not having been properly rewarded for her ignoble services to great ladies. There were still some others who spoke of her as being a cast-off mistress of d'Épernon, which seems to have been unlikely, considering her afflictions. L'Estoile, however, says nothing of the kind beyond hinting that she allowed herself to go too far and incurred a terrible retribution by doing so. Bassompierre passes her over in almost contempt, while the historians confine themselves to recording her story to the Council ten months after the death of Henri, and also her sentence.

But the statements of ten months afterwards did not vary very much from what they had been before the murder, and both the earlier and the later ones received strange confirmation from what did occur beyond all doubt. One of her charges was that the Marquise de Verneuil was a leading feature in the plot against the King, and we have seen in the description of that lady that she, her father and her brother, were absolutely involved in a plot against him. Another was that d'Épernon was the second conspirator, and we have full proof of the fact that, from the time of Henri obtaining the throne, the man's existence was spent in plotting against him, of his being suspected of such

acts, and of his losing most of his great charges and offices, and of, indeed, his being banished to one of them—Loches—as a punishment. Moreover, Épernon, a little, insignificant town near Rambouillet, was the centre of his estates and the name of his duchy and close to the birthplace of Jacqueline le Voyer; while, as she was in the habit of wandering about and, probably, of visiting her old home—which was, like Rambouillet, but a short distance from Paris—it is not unlikely that she may there have picked up scraps of intelligence which would not have reached her ears in a great city.

There are, however, some still more extraordinary corroborations of the fact that, whatever this woman knew before the murder of the King, or whatever she told afterwards when confronted with her judges, she was not alone in her ideas.

Prior to the destruction of the Bastille during the French Revolution—in which place were preserved not only its own archives but also many remarkable documents relating to State affairs,* there was amongst them a paper entitled "*Extrait d'un Manuscrit trouvé à la mort de M. d'Aumale en son cabinet, signé de sa main et cacheté de ses armes,*" in which this duke says of d'Épernon:

* If anyone would know the manner in which some of those papers were traced and unearthed in our own days, I would refer them to the fascinating work of M. F. Ravaisson, entitled *Archives de la Bastille.*

" He is the author of the King's death, he having raised up many disappointed beggars and outcasts whom he caused to be looked after (*traiter*) by many bribed persons ; but while pursuing their designs and ready to execute them, God forbade (or prevented) their evil intentions, and d'Épernon, seeing that the days selected and the occasions were discovered which thereby chilled these poor wretches, he caused them to be poisoned from fear that, struck to the heart with a feeling of repentance, they would become denouncers of the abominable enterprise ; but, nevertheless, he so much persisted that at last he found the wicked Ravaillac, who was of Angoulême, in one of his governorships."

Now, this document, although said to be written by a man of high rank and royal blood who would be extremely likely to learn much of all that was going on before the King's murder, can only be taken as one that justifies any suspicions which the majority of the population of Paris possessed, for the simple reason that, in it, the Duc d'Aumale of those days makes a statement (if he wrote it) which considerable research indubitably proves to be wrong. The object of these pages is not to exonerate d'Épernon and the Marquise de Verneuil from being conspirators—as it is almost certain they were—but to show that they had no connection with

Ravaillac, who was meditating the deed on his own account alone, and alone perpetrated it, and that, consequently, he also had no connection with them. If, therefore, all evidence, sifted carefully and carefully compared, shows that this was the case, M. d'Aumale could not be right in his statement concerning Ravaillac. Such was, however, the popular opinion of the time. Ravaillac's name has been coupled through three centuries with whatever groups, aristocratic or clerical, were meditating the murder of the King, and nothing but further time and a skilful turning over of documents herein referred to will destroy that opinion, which, amongst careless students, still exists. It is pardonable that it should do so, for, from the very first, the pamphleteers, the writers of brochures, the people who called themselves critics yet were but wretched hirelings ready to prostitute their pens to the order of any person who would give them a gold crown, or to abuse their betters and, in fact, to criticize the man instead of his work—as well as the historians of later and more enlightened days—have all stated and promulgated the same opinion. Among the earliest of these broadsheets was one published anonymously, and entitled *La chemise sanglante de Henri-le-Grand*, in which the King's ghost is made to appear before Louis XIII. and to say, speaking of the Ducs de Bouillon and

d'Épernon, "they still hold above France the dagger with which Ravaillac sent me to the tomb. They were my assassins and executioners and yet you permit them to be near your person." Among the latter-day historians was the late M. Michelet, who held firmly to the supposition that Ravaillac was the hired tool of d'Épernon—Ravaillac who begged for alms at the church doors and had decided to leave Paris the day after the murder had it not occurred when it did, since he no longer had money for food or lodging. It is not of such material as this that murderers hired by wealthy conspirators are made! But M. Michelet was, unhappily, a careless historian though a charming writer.*

To return, however, to Jacqueline le Voyer and to the suggestion that Henri might well have been warned of his imminent danger by some person who either knew, or thought he knew, of what was brewing, is it not possible that this person was none other than she? Later, when she was before her judges, steps were taken to silence her for ever. As, however, this matter will presently be dealt with, it is advisable to continue the attempt to discover if Henri was likely to have had

* To those who would see the amount of errors this historian was capable of perpetrating, I would suggest that they should read M. Edmond Biré's *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris pendant la Terreur* (crowned by the Académie Française), in which this author proves him inaccurate in a vast number of instances, viz., 19.

any direct information accorded him of what was to be his fate, or whether the common rumours which must have reached his ears—there were enough of them !—were the only reasons for the certainty he felt of his impending tragical end. The Marquise de Verneuil may, in his imagination, have been harmless, since, although he had on his marriage informed the Queen that she "had been" his mistress, she was in solemn fact still occupying that position and, except at the time when their various quarrels and her treachery took place, never ceased to do so. With regard to d'Épernon, Henri was well on his guard against him and he did his best to render the traitor harmless while, still, for precaution's sake, allowing him to be about his Court. He could not, however, have been blind to the numerous other persons and groups of persons to whom he was abhorrent and who would gladly have seen him dead.

Amongst such individuals, many writers, especially those of the more distant past, had much justification in classing the Queen. No woman can ever have received more humiliating infidelity from her husband—considering that not one of Henri's amours could have been carried on in secrecy—than she received from hers. They were unending and they were not even single intrigues indulged in one after the other, but were often

simultaneously five or six in number.* And, now, when he was fifty-six years of age, and when—though he, of course, could only fear it without knowing it—his death was close at hand, Henri indulged in one last folly (if it does not merit a more severe name) of which Marie de Médici was, with the rest of France, fully cognisant. He suddenly became infatuated with Charlotte de Montmorency, a girl of sixteen and a member of one of the most noble families in France below royalty, and the wife of Henri's own second cousin, the Prince de Condé. On her part, the young lady appeared nothing loth to receive his attentions, but, at the same time, she did not forget the blood that ran in her veins and all that was due to it. Consequently, she was resolved that, if she was to smirch the ancient names of her own and her husband's house, she would at least become the bearer of a greater one and the possessor of a rank which, in France, could have no equal. She, therefore, informed her royal admirer that, until he could procure a divorce from Marie and also bring about one between herself and Condé, she would neither listen to him nor see him, and that, even then, she could be

* In justice to Henri it should be said that he offered to send these women away from him if Marie would do the same with Concini and his wife, and also with the miserable woman who was called "La mère Dasithée," and frequently prophesied Henri's death. Marie refused to do either.

nothing more to him than a cousin by marriage until she became Queen of France.

Over Henri II. de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, and, afterwards, father of the Great Condé, more than one dark shadow had lowered from the time of his birth. His mother, Charlotte, a daughter of the great house of De La Tremouille, had, to put the lightest construction on her conduct, been far from circumspect and from comporting herself in a manner suitable to a descendant of her race or the wife of a Bourbon. A handsome young page in her service named Belcastel was supposed to have obtained more favours from her than any woman, married or single, should have consented to bestow, and the whole of Paris was agog with gossip on this subject when an even more terrible suspicion concerning her arose in the minds of all.

The then Prince de Condé, husband of the Princess, had, after indulging in violent exercise in tilting at the ring, supped and retired to bed. In the middle of the night he was awakened by feeling ill, became very sick, and remained in bed for twenty-four hours; he then took supper and slept well and, on the second day, rose, dined in his bedroom and played at chess with one of his friends. After this he walked about the room while talking to one and another of those who had come to obtain news of his health, when,

suddenly, he exclaimed, "Bring me a chair! I am very weak." The chair was brought, he sank into it and, a little while afterwards, died without uttering another word.

This is the testimony of no less a personage than Henri IV. himself, who, having gleaned the most reliable news on the matter, instantly sat down and wrote it to his flame of the moment, Diane, Comtesse de Guiche, better known to posterity by the sobriquet he conferred on her of "La Belle Corisande." The letter is at the present time in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, and it concludes with the words, "The marks of poison soon appeared" ("*sortirent soudain*").

Suspicion at once fastened on Belcastel and a valet named Corbais and was strengthened by the disappearance of both, who were, however, quickly discovered to have fled on horses supplied to them by the controller of the household of the Prince. Corbais, being put to the torture, stated that it was the Princess who had poisoned her husband, and, the recollection of her intimacy with Belcastel being fresh in the minds of all, the statement was generally believed. Henri—himself the best authority of all for us in this matter, by aid of his letters to Corisande—believed it also, and, in his second letter, concludes with the almost indisputable piece of philosophy that, "the most dangerous wild-

beast is a wicked woman." It may be said that his own experience had probably taught him so much as this long before the present affair arose! The page was executed and the Princess was confined for seven years under very strict watch and ward, during which time Henri, third Prince de Condé, was born, six months after his father's sudden death. Some considerable doubt has, however, always existed as to whether either the page or the Princess was guilty of murder, or whether the second Prince de Condé was murdered at all. The Princess may, undoubtedly, have instigated or performed the deed with a view to saving herself from her husband's vengeance in a certain future case, but, on the other hand, he was a man detested by The Leaguers, who, like others in such times, did not hesitate at much; and, also, he had long been in a serious state of health, while the physicians were by no means in agreement over the fact of poison having been administered.

The child's and, afterwards, the young man's, existence was, however, much darkened by his father's mysterious death and his mother's undoubted lightness —if her behaviour was no worse than that! He stood near the throne—should Henri de Navarre finally secure it*—provided that his birth could not be impugned,

* He was born September 1st, 1588, a year before Henri became absolute King of France.

and, as time went on; and before Henri was married to Marie de Médici, he appeared well-inclined to recognize the young Prince as the future King of France in succession to himself. In doing so later, the King, by acknowledging the son's position, removed the stigma that rested on the mother, and he yielded to a petition (as well as to his own good nature), signed by the noblest-born women and men of France. Consequently, Charlotte, Princesse de Condé, stood forth a woman free of any stain on her character, and her son as the recognized heir to the throne short of Henri divorcing Marguerite and marrying a wife who could present him with a son, or of his legitimatizing the eldest of those sons with whom Gabrielle had already presented him.

It was unfortunate for the young Prince, that as he reached manhood, he frequently ran counter to the wishes of his illustrious relative, though, in doing so, he was unfortunate through no fault of his own. He was awkward, nervous and not particularly good-looking, but he was brave and soldierly—which excused everything in Henri's eyes. He challenged the Duc de Nevers for having let fall some words reflecting on his mother —words that the Duke never intended should reach his ears; and he was bold enough to tell Henri (who was pressing Charlotte de Montmorency so strongly that he

ordered Condé not to quit Paris with her) that he was practising tyranny. It is possible that, at first, Henri was tempted to slay the young man for his temerity, but, controlling himself (if such were the case), he refrained from doing so. He inflicted on him, however, as deep a wound with his tongue as he could have done with his sword by remarking that he had never performed but one act of tyranny in his life, namely, when he had caused the Prince to be acknowledged and recognized as that which he was not. He then ordered him to quit his presence. Nevertheless, the victory was, surely, on the side of Condé.*

As Mademoiselle de Montmorency, the Princess had been brought to Court by her aunt and, amongst all who had admired her for her youth, freshness and beauty, none had done so more than Henri, who, however, did not at first testify any greater desire for her society than that shown by the expression of a wish that, as he grew older, she might always be near to cheer and amuse him. At the same time, the brilliant, good-looking and clever Bassompierre seemed to have won her affections, and Henri gave his consent to their marriage while conferring on the intended bridegroom the office of first gentleman of the bedchamber. This,

* D'Aubigné. L'Estoile. Bassompierre. *Les Princes de Condé*, par M. le Duc d'Aumale, Paris, 1864.

however, did not agree at all with the ideas of the Duc de Bouillon, who was the titular holder of this office and also the uncle of Mademoiselle de Montmorency, whereupon he remarked that Bassompierre should have neither his niece nor his position. Being a resolute, as well as a very astute, man, he conceived the idea of suggesting to the King that the most suitable husband for that niece would be the Prince de Condé, their families being closely united by friendship while the bride and bridegroom would be of a suitable age for marriage. There was, he also stated, but one other lady fitted by her rank to become the wife of the Prince, and that was the daughter of the Duc de Mayenne, Henri's old and bitter enemy. Henri fell in with de Bouillon's scheme, which was proposed by that nobleman more to gratify his own dislike of Bassompierre, by robbing him of his bride, than to study the interest of the King, Condé or the Montmorencys, and the matter was at once considered and arranged. The only persons who were not consulted were Mademoiselle de Montmorency and Bassompierre—who might have been considered as the most interested ones—so that, when the latter went to see Henri, who was laid up with one of his periodical attacks of gout, and learnt that his Majesty now desired him to become the husband of Mademoiselle d'Aumale it is not surprising that he ex-

BASSOMPIERRE.

[*Facing p.* 218

claimed, "What! Am I to marry two women?" His Majesty was, however, in spite of his easy nature, in the habit of being very explicit in concerns that moved him deeply, and he at once informed Bassompierre that he had not only fallen in love with Mademoiselle de Montmorency, but had done so madly. "Therefore," he said, "if you marry her and she loves you, I shall hate you, and if she learns to love me you will hate me." After which Henri added—*en ami*, to use his own words—that he was rapidly approaching old age, that he only desired that Mademoiselle de Montmorency should be a consolation and an amusing companion to him and be able to show him some little affection, to obtain all of which he had resolved to marry her to his young cousin—a line of argument which may appear sufficiently remarkable to latter-day readers. In any case, Bassompierre accepted the situation and probably reconciled himself easily enough to it, since his own affections were generally engaged two or three deep.

This was, as has been said, Henri's last infatuation, but, true to his old character, he, in spite of having recently spoken of himself as a "grey-bearded but victorious King," was still disposed to indulge it in the usual romantic fashion. One day when the Prince de Condé was hunting in Picardy while the Princess, as Mademoiselle had now become, was about to follow

in a light coach with the Dowager Princess, they observed a falconer with a hawk on his wrist loitering in the courtyard. Orders were given for the carriage to set out instantly, but, on the return, a new transformation had taken place, since the King, who had at first become a falconer, had now transformed himself into a huntsman who led a dog in a leash. It is not wonderful that, after all these untiring attentions to his wife, Condé thought it wise to put the frontier between himself and his wife and his august cousin.

The infatuated lover was, however, not to be thwarted, and he at once set about taking steps to discover whether the Princess's somewhat startling demands for the double divorce could in any way be complied with, and, in the interval, Charlotte had departed with her husband to Brussels, then, as long afterwards, a Spanish possession. Meanwhile, as the whole story leaked out, Henri became the butt of Europe, one wit remarking that if Spain could not vanquish the King of France by force of arms it could at least do so by turning him into an object of ridicule. And, amongst those who knew all that was going on, and who inevitably heard all the gibes and jeers on the subject, was Marie de Médici !

Madness, indeed, seemed to have seized on the un-

fortunate monarch at this time. His first act was to call together his Ministers and discuss with them an outbreak of war with Spain, which, if it was not solely entered into on account of the Princesse de Condé, was shortly to occur. Previously to this he had summoned the Marquis de Cœuvres, brother of his late love, Gabrielle d'Estrées, to proceed to Brussels and carry off the object of his last infatuation and bring her back to Paris. His next impulse was to commit an act of imprudence which, if ordinary propriety and good-breeding could not prevent him from perpetrating, good sense should have done. Believing that de Cœuvres had succeeded in the task upon which he had been sent, he suddenly exclaimed to his wife, "On such a day and such an hour you will see the Princesse de Condé back here again." Verily, Marie de Médici—the "vindictive Florentine," "the daughter of a race of poisoners," was subjected to almost enough slights to justify her in following in the footsteps of her forerunners.

Henri had not, however, finished with his attempts to get the girl young enough to be his grand-daughter into his hands. He ordered his nephew to return to France—with his wife—under the pain of being declared a traitor; and he caused the Constable de Montmorency to order his daughter to do so. But Condé simply

removed himself and his wife to Italy, and Spain refused to allow those who governed Brussels on her behalf to make any move in the matter. Henri then declared war on Spain, two of his armies set out for the frontier and he himself made ready to follow them later and take command—when the fatal blow fell.

Meanwhile, Marie de Médici was deeply wounded by not only his last infidelity to her, but also by the fact that, though she alone could be constituted Regent during his absence, he gave her as companions a council of fifteen colleagues, each of whom would have as powerful voices in any of the deliberations as she would herself.

Now, therefore, she recognized that she was in a terrible position and that, when Henri should return from the campaign, she would in all probability find herself in a worse one. She was perfectly cognisant of the passion that was swaying her husband at the moment, and she knew that, if he was resolved to divorce her and disgrace himself in the eyes of the world, there was nothing that could prevent him from doing so. He was by far the most powerful King in Europe, Philip III. of Spain being but a cipher in comparison with the late Philip II.; while as for the Pope, who alone had the authority to prevent the divorce and the marriage that would be subsequent to it, he would

be afraid to offend the King of France since he could play havoc with all the countries that supported his Holiness.

It was not, indeed, possible that the first of these could oppose him, or that the second would wish to do so. Philip II., in spite of all the wealth that Mexico and Peru had continued to pour into the coffers of Spain since the days of Ferdinand and Isabella, left an inheritance worse than even a barren one to Philip III. The enormous armies of the former, the stupendous sums of money paid out as bribes—principally to exterminate the Protestants—and the colossal expenses of the Armada (four million ducats), had plunged the country into an abyss of debt from which it seemed impossible that it could ever escape. At the death of Philip II. his successor discovered that the treasury was empty and that there was owing, in various shapes and forms, a sum of twelve hundred and fifty odd millions of livres, the livre of that day being worth a little more than the French franc of the present time. But the franc of the present time will only buy a fifth part of what the livre of Henri's day would purchase, and, consequently, the debt was equal to two hundred and fifty million pounds or more of our own money of to-day.

As for the Pope, he hoped that Henri would soon

carry into practice a scheme long since propounded by Sully, and obtain the annexation of the Kingdom of Naples to his own dominions. From him, therefore, no opposition of any kind would be likely to come. But if it should come from either Spain—which Henri now proposed to attack—or from the Emperor of Germany, who had not a single ally but many enemies, all of whom were thirsting for his death, which was imminent, and had already arranged between themselves that the Duke of Bavaria was to take his throne, that opposition would be in vain. Henri had, at this time, thirteen different armies ready to take the field; Sully, as Master-General of the Artillery, had caused two hundred new and great cannon to be added to the equipment of those armies, and there was a sum of money put aside by him, in his other capacity of Minister of Finances, which amounted to a hundred and fifty millions of livres.*

That Marie should ask her husband what his intentions towards her would be when he returned from the war, was, therefore, not strange; while, also, it was only reasonable on her part to press firmly her determination to be crowned. As we know, she succeeded in this, and therein lay her salvation from divorce if Henri should return safe, since a crowned Queen was far more

* Sismondi. Poirson.

securely seated on the throne than an uncrowned one could ever be. And, though she was not aware of it, the act was also her salvation for many years after Henri was dead. For d'Épernon would never have lent her his aid had she not been crowned. It was not to his interests to espouse the cause of any person when that cause was not as secure as it could be before he undertook to champion it.

Now no charge against Marie de Médici has ever been urged so strongly as proof of her connivance in a plot, or *the* plot—since it undoubtedly existed—as was this determination on her part to be made safe in every way possible. As has been shown, however, nothing tends more to prove her innocence of any such participation. For, once crowned, she was secure without the aid of any plot to remove Henri; safe while he lived and safe when he was dead. It is true, however, that Marie was far from feeling sure of this safety even during her husband's life. Once, on the occasion of one of their many quarrels, Henri threatened to exile her to some distant château, and, even though she might have forgotten this sinister suggestion, there were those about the Court who were not disposed to let the recollection of it fade from her memory. Leonora Galigaï never ceased to remind her of it, while, if she forgot to do so, Concini, in his turn, spurred her on to the work.

Gradually the unhappy Queen became a prey to fears which—since she was never strong-minded and, indeed, possessed only one form of strength, namely, that of dogged and morose obstinacy—might well have driven her distracted. Marie knew well that the Princesse de Condé was too much suffused with her pride of race to ever yield to Henri on any terms short of occupying the place that she herself possessed, and she also saw plainly that, in a case such as this, nothing could turn Henri from his desires. She, therefore, became the victim of terrible surmises. She believed that she was about to be poisoned, while forgetting that all the poisoners in Paris were of her country and not of her husband's; and whenever Henri sent her dishes from the table at which he sat—it being the custom on ordinary occasions for the King to take the head of one table and the Queen of another—she refused them firmly and ate only of those which Leonora Galigaï had prepared for her at, of course, her own suggestion, or from dishes which the other had previously tasted ostentatiously.

Marie de Médici should have possessed more wisdom, more power of reflection. If poisoning was to be practised, the Italian woman was far more capable of the deed than her own husband and, had it been to Leonora Galigaï's interest to poison the Queen—which

it was not—she would doubtless have done so unhesitatingly. While, as regards Henri, she should have known him better. With the exception of his one terrible failing, his good qualities far outstripped his bad. He was a brave man, and brave men, even when they sink to crimes, do not sink to ignoble and cowardly ones. Henri might, in his frenzy for Charlotte de Condé, have sent Marie into exile, as their son did afterwards; he might have forced the Pope into granting him a divorce from her; but he would no more have poisoned her than he would have beaten a defenceless woman or struck a cripple.

It is now necessary to separate from each other the plot which was undoubtedly on foot to slay Henri and the determination of a religious fanatic and visionary who felt that it was his duty to assassinate the King and was determined that, in doing so, he would be entirely without assistance, allies or employers. And, indeed, it may be said of Ravaillac with justice that, had not his madness led him to commit the dreadful deed he enacted, there was something in him which, in less erring men, would have been termed greatness. His religion was so much to him that it had driven him mad; yet, withal, he was strong, he was truthful and he was independent. He would ask alms, but would

not receive pay as a hired assassin ; he would steal the knife with which he slew the King, yet he had determined to leave Paris because he could no longer pay the woman of the house wherein he found a wretched lodging ; and, above all, he made more than one attempt to see Henri and implore him not to attack the Pope—which, as has been shown, Henri had never the least intention of doing—ere he resorted to murder. Unfortunately, he was driven from the door of the Louvre and, when he endeavoured to make the King listen to him as he went by in the street, no heed was paid to him. After that it was but a question of days ere the King was slain.

François Ravaillac was born of very humble parents at Angoulême, in the year 1578, and was, consequently, only thirty-two when he assassinated Henri IV. It has been said that his mental faculties were very weak, and, whether this were so or not, there was a strain in his blood which tended towards murder, he being connected with Poltrot, who assassinated François, Duc de Guise, at the Siege of Orléans. As a child, he appears to have had a mawkish, and—for one so young — sickly inclination towards religious ceremonials, and was more often to be found in church than attending to any duties that his parents might require him to perform. His tendencies were

RAVAILLAC.

[*Facing p.* 229

entirely towards the priesthood, but the resources of those parents, who lived almost wholly by the alms of neighbours better endowed with the world's goods than they, necessitated his doing something to aid in their support, and he became for a time a *valet de chambre.* Later, he emancipated himself from this servile state of existence which was not at all in accord with his desires, and he managed to set up as a petty provincial solicitor and a conductor of small cases in local courts, a calling which is termed in France that of *solliciteur de procès.* His earnings in this manner were, however, so meagre that he supplemented them by teaching the children of his own class of life how to read and write, but even with this addition to his means he was scarcely able to procure bread.

At this time he was thrown into prison by some creditors, and during this period his mind became more impregnated with fanaticism than it had hitherto been. On attaining his release he became a novice of the order of *Les Feuillants,* but his extraordinary hallucinations, his visions and imaginary conversations with the Virgin and other sacred personages, and the general eccentricity of his behaviour, caused his probation to be cut short by summary dismissal from the monastery. Nothing disheartened, he next attempted to become a member of

the Society of Jesus, but was again rejected and was forced to fall back upon his original callings of solicitor and schoolmaster to procure a livelihood, which, if obtained at all, was but of a very sparse and miserable nature. In spite, however, of the disordered state of the man's intellect, his course of life seems to have been of an utterly irreproachable nature; he lived honestly and was a good son to his mother, who worshipped him. A false charge was, nevertheless, brought against him of having been concerned in a murder that took place at this time and, though he was instantly acquitted of any share in it and discharged with honour, he was at once thrown back into prison on account of the debts which he had accumulated in providing for his defence.

In this place his warped mind seems to have asserted itself in a manner which clearly pointed to the fact that, good as his natural qualities might be, there were within him some strange chords, or idiosyncrasies, which would eventually go far to pervert, if not to destroy, all his better faculties and impulses. He commenced, in his cell, to exhibit poetical leanings—a tendency in others that, then as now, has often furnished matter for the derision and scorn of feeble wits—and wrote madrigals and sonnets, but, more often, pious effusions, all of which were pronounced by those of his own

time to have been wretched doggerel.* What, however, was worse than his verses was a recurrence, in a more pronounced form, of the visions he had previously experienced, and from these he was led to think deeply upon subjects which, on behalf of himself and humanity, it would have been far better for him to have never considered. Soon his thoughts and studies and rhapsodies in prison brought him to such a state of ecstasy that he formed the opinion that he was born to become a great man, and, from this, to the belief that Heaven had sent him into the world to enact the part of the Pope's principal champion and protector. From these opinions and self-gratulations there was but one step more, namely, to imagine that it would be his duty to slay any man who should endeavour to outrage or attack his Holiness.

Ravaillac made these views more or less public to the priests and to whatever friends he possessed when he was discharged from prison, and, though most of his hearers regarded him as either a madman or a fool, his extraordinary statements about himself caused considerable remark.

* One distich of his composing was:

"Ne souffre pas qu'on fasse, en Ta présence,
Au nom de Dieu aucune irrévérence."

In spite of the confusion of referring to the presence of the Deity while calling upon His name, it was not Ravaillac's worst poetical attempt.

It is with this fact before us that we at once find ourselves nearing the primal cause of the erroneous association, during a long space of time, of Ravaillac's deed with the plot of the Duc d'Épernon. It will be recalled that, among the many high offices to which this personage had attained during his long and despicable career under Henri III. and Henri IV., one was that of Governor of Angoumois, of which Angoulême was then the capital town, as it is now of the Department of Charente. It will, therefore, astonish no one that, between the half-witted fanatic who was afterwards to assassinate Henri and the truculent autocrat who was known to be Henri's most bitter enemy as well as the chief plotter against his life, a connection of tool and employer should have been at once imagined. The supposition was, however, an erroneous one, as will be shown later, and, indeed, proved, by demonstrating that at the moment Ravaillac accomplished his evil deed, no one was more astonished at discovering who the man was who had performed it, and no one more prompt to avail himself of the opportunity that had arisen of cloaking his own well-arranged but now anticipated intentions, than d'Épernon. But, independently of this, it is doubtful if d'Épernon had ever heard of Ravaillac, and almost certain that Ravaillac had hardly ever seen him, though, in his interrogatories after the

crime, he said vaguely that he knew of him. That he could truthfully declare this—and, with all his sin and madness, Ravaillac was no liar—is not at all to be wondered at. The governor of the province, the man who had resided in the great house, the Citadel, of Angoulême—though he did not often trouble it with his presence—would be as much "known of" there as the most important personage of any small town in England, the bishop of any city, or the Member of Parliament, is "known of" by the more humble inhabitants of the place. But between "knowing of" such personages and "knowing them" there is a wide difference.

Moreover, what possible need would there be for d'Épernon to associate himself with such a poor, demented creature as Ravaillac; while, if there were any such need, is it at all likely that he would have selected a man dwelling in one of the places where he himself ruled paramount and where, if he should eventually become seriously implicated in the murder of the King, the most damning of evidence would be forthcoming? But, in truth, there was no such need. Behind d'Épernon there rode eight hundred spears, most of them bravoes like himself; any one of whom would have been willing to perform his behests, and since he would be well paid to hold his tongue, would do so and remain silent as the grave.

While acknowledging, therefore, that the coincidence of Ravaillac being a poor, inferior inhabitant of the town over which d'Épernon ruled *en grand seigneur* was well calculated to set on foot the story that the former was the paid mercenary of the latter, it may be dismissed as nothing more than a coincidence. Also, if further proof were required that such was the case, it exists in the fact of Ravaillac's continual poverty and in the certainty that, had he been in d'Épernon's pay, he would have been well supplied with money.

At the time when his remarkable statements on the subject of his recognizing that he was ordained to protect the Pope and kill those who were opposed to his Holiness were made, Ravaillac was still far from having formed any resolutions to slay Henri, and had, indeed, no murderous inclinations in his heart towards any particular person. Insanity had, however, touched him in a mild form, and vanity—so often a forerunner, or companion, of insanity—was strongly developed in him. He believed that, if he could but obtain the ear of the King, he might so work upon him by his prayers and beseechings that he would be able to induce him to alter all his views of attacking the Pope. Fate was, however, unpropitious in connection with both the King and his future assassin. Had Ravaillac known that which many people more highly placed than

he could have told him, namely, that Henri was a strong protector of the Catholics, and especially of the Jesuits, he would in all probability have considered that no more than this could be expected of the King, and would have recognized that his other desire, that the Huguenots should be strongly oppressed, might be dispensed with. Or, had those who prevented Ravaillac from seeing the King, those who repulsed him at the door of the Louvre, allowed him to speak with Henri, he would probably have received only the kindly answers which the latter was in the habit of bestowing upon every suppliant. Henri might even have told him that his true policy was to support the Pope (though it is not likely that he would have also informed him that one of his principal reasons for doing so was his infatuation for the Princesse de Condé), and Ravaillac would doubtless have turned away while understanding that the mission which he imagined himself called upon by God to fulfil had no longer any existence.

But such was not the case. Three times had he struggled on foot through the spring rains and mire from Angoulême to Paris, and twice had he returned to the former; and on each of the latter occasions he had gone back disheartened. The Marquis de la Force, who had command of all the guards around the King and at the Louvre, had ordered him to be repulsed, and

Ravaillac recognized at last that his hope of appealing to the King was vain. Yet, had Ravaillac but been aware that when the Marquis had asked Henri if he should not imprison the wretched scarecrow who was so importunate, the latter had replied, "No! no! it is no harm that he does in wishing to see me. Be not severe with him," how different might all have been, how altered the history of France!

At last the miserable creature grew desperate. He besought every person of any importance whom he encountered to obtain him access to the King, only to be driven away or treated as an imbecile. But still he persevered. Knowing that Henri would on one day pass by "*Les Innocents*" — and the open cemetery — he awaited his carriage and cried out loudly when it appeared: "In the name of Our Lord and the Sacred Virgin let me speak with you!" But again he was repulsed, and driven off with jeers and buffets by the people. Then definitely, finally, he understood that one part, the best part of his determination, namely, to address the King as a subject addressing a ruler, could never be realized. Nothing remained but to perform the second part, the worst part, of that determination. To slay the man who was, he wrongly supposed, bitterly hostile to all that was sacred to him.

He was, however, at his last resources now. The

alms he begged scarcely provided enough to keep a rat in food; he had no money sufficient for a bed and again slept in the streets or under church porches. There was but one thing left to do: to return to Angoulême, to resume his occupation of teaching the children of the poor who would confide them to his care, and, in some way to scrape together enough money to enable him to live until he should once more be able to revisit Paris —for the last time. After that, he would require nothing more!

Whether he saved much or little—it must have been the latter—he appeared again in the Capital, and his first act was to steal the knife with which he was eventually to murder the King. But now his visions once more took hold upon him, though at this time they assumed a different form. Doubts arose, visited his mind, during these visions as to whether he was justified in slaying even a bad King, a monster such as he deemed Henri to be; and whether also a better king—or better counsellors of the boy, Louis—would succeed to Henri. Oppressed by these doubts, he once more quitted Paris, and so resolved was he now to make no farther attempt to slay Henri that, in a fit of frenzy, he struck his knife against a garden-wall near Étampes and broke off a couple of inches of the point. A little later he passed a cross on which was the Sacred Figure, and his doubts

vanished, his original intentions returned to him. The impressions which his view of the Saviour on His Cross and in His Passion occasioned were confirmed by the news which reached his ears in the ancient city. This news—utterly false and having no more foundation than the babble of a number of provincial *bourgeois'*—was to the effect that Henri was about to make war on the Pope and transfer the Holy See to Paris.

Ravaillac instantly sharpened his broken knife on a stone, and, retracing his steps, arrived in the Capital for the last time.

Meanwhile, all was prepared for the departure of Henri to take command of one of his armies which was about to attack the Spanish forces, or rather those of the House of Austria, which was practically the same thing, since Spain and Austria were never disunited until the first Bourbon king ascended the throne of Spain on the death of Carlos II. of that country. The attack was to be a strong one, since, of the thirteen armies, some were opposed to the Spaniards in Holland, some in Italy, some in Germany and some in Spain, while it is interesting to us, if not to those of other lands, to note that the commanders of these armies were nearly all to be Protestants. Among them were Sully and his son, the Marquis de Rosny, and also his son-in-law, the Duc de Rohan, as well as La Force

and Lesdiguières, Prince Maurice of Nassau, several German Protestant princes, the Kings of Sweden and Denmark, and last, but not least, Prince Henry Frederick, son of King James I. of England and Prince of Wales.

Yet, as the time for action approached, there seemed to creep over Henri a strange lassitude such as probably he had never experienced before. He, to whom war had been as much his sport in active life as, in his hours of ease, love had been, seemed to have grown suddenly dejected, and, indeed, domesticated, since he stayed much at home; his briskness and alacrity, "the fierce joy that warriors feel," seemed to have left him. This depression may have arisen from the fact that he knew how, as the days went on, his life was more and more aimed at by plotters and assassins; yet, even though such were the case, it is strange that at this period such reflections should have troubled him. He was to set out upon a great campaign, and, though a noble death upon the field might be his lot, a death that he had faced a hundred times, it would at least be the portion of a soldier and far better than the stab from an assassin lurking in some dark alley or a shot fired from an ambush by a hired bravo.

The believers in presentiment may well find a justifi-

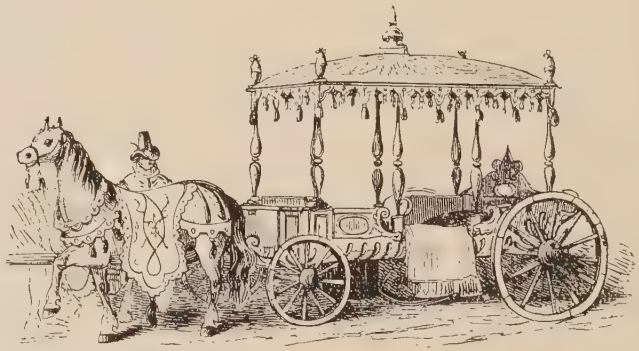
cation for their faith in remembering the King's feelings and apprehensions during the time closely preceding his death. It was observed by all—and Richelieu noted the fact with his usual astuteness—that he drew nearer to his wife to the exclusion of all thought of those, and especially of the one, who had come so much between them; that he could not bear to be without her company or to let her leave him alone even for a day. Moreover, he took pains to instruct her in all that it would be necessary for her to do in case he should die suddenly; he told her where his most important papers were to be found, what her actions should be to ensure her proclamation as Regent, and how she might best safeguard the rights and succession of the Dauphin. At the same time, if they were separated for even the shortest period he wrote letters to her that he should have thought of inditing long before; letters containing phrases suitable for address to the woman who, with all her failings, had been an honest wife to him, but utterly unsuitable to the meretricious creatures to whom such epistles had only too often been despatched. "My heart, I kiss you a hundred thousand times"; "*Ma mie*, I send you good night and a thousand kisses"; "I love you always, I cannot sleep until I have written to you," are but a few specimens of his letters at this time. *O! si sic omnia!*

It has been said by many that this sudden love for his wife, and these demonstrations, were principally owing to the fact that he sought refuge in her society from the disappointment he felt at the fact that the last woman to whom he was attracted, Charlotte de Montmorency, would not listen to him any longer and had fled with her husband out of France to avoid his attentions. His behaviour does not, however, justify the gibe, though his admiration for the young princess of sixteen is undoubted. That Marie was impressed by his sincerity is also a proof that he was a changed man, since she herself began to be nervous and alarmed at the alteration in him. One night she roused him by screaming that she had had a dream that he was being murdered, but he calmed her by saying that there never was a dream which, if it had any result at all, did not have a contrary one to that which it foretold.

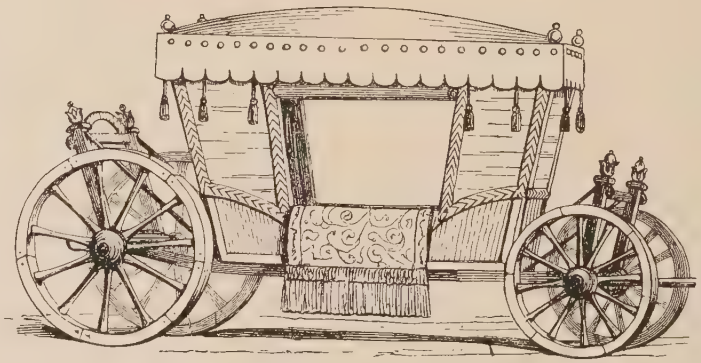
It is doubtful, however, if he believed his own words. After the various attempts made on his life he was in the habit of remarking that one must at last succeed; that he was doomed; that he was certain to die a violent death. He frequently stated that both the Catholics and the Protestants hated him, the first because his conversion was an assumed one, and the second because he was an apostate; while, when he felt sure that his time was drawing near, it was his habit to converse

freely with Sully on the matter, and, on one occasion, he asked the latter if he could have a bed at the Arsenal (Sully's official residence) for the last nights before he set out on the Spanish-Austrian campaign. The great Minister has put it on record that the King would sit in a low chair before him tapping his fingers on his spectacle-case, and that, after some time spent in this way, he would slap his knees with his hands, spring up suddenly from the chair and cry, "*Pardieu!* I shall die in this city, I shall never leave it. They will kill me!" After which he would become more calm, would be seated again and finally console himself by remarking that what God had decided on was inevitable and that a man must cheerfully bow to his destiny without attempting to oppose it.

On the morning of his assassination the presentiment that he was to die was strong upon him. He desired particularly to see Sully, who was ill, yet he could not determine to leave the Louvre; he hesitated much, said he must go, and then did not do so. He embraced the Queen so often while bidding her adieu for the time and so often came back again after he had parted from her, that, at last, she herself became terribly agitated. "You must not go," she cried, and, flinging herself on her knees, implored him to stay at home while saying that he could see Sully on the morrow. His answer



Voiture dans laquelle fut assassiné Henri IV en 1610.



Carrosse de 1610 à 1660

One of the pillars of the first illustration has been forgotten by the artist. There were eight.

[*Facing p.* 243

was : " I must go ; I must. It is not possible for me to stay here. I have much to tell Sully ; much that weighs upon my heart."

The carriage in which Henri set out for the Arsenal was an open one, with its floor so near the ground that a moderately stout man could scarcely have crawled beneath it. Above it, supported by eight slim pillars, was a kind of roof or canopy which more resembled the top of an open tent, or summer-house, than aught else, while what curtains it possessed were thrown outside the carriage and almost brushed the earth as it proceeded on its way. Into this Henri entered, placing the Duc d'Épernon on his left hand. In front of him by the doors were the Duc de Montbazon and the Comte de Roquelaure ; next came the Marquis de la Force, with, on the other side, the Maréchal de Lavardin and M. de Liancourt ; the Marquis de Mirebeau* and the principal squire (in modern language, an attaché) of the King completed the company which filled the large and roomy vehicle. On entering it Henri flung his arm over the shoulder of the Duc de Montbazon (some authorities say over the shoulder of d'Épernon), and thus they progressed until " *La Croix du Tiroir* " was reached, when he was asked to what spot he intended

* According to contemporary writers. Modern ones often spell it Mirabeau. But the title of the family of Mirabeau, the revolutionist, was Marquis de Riqueti or Riquetti.

to proceed—a question which, one would imagine, would be more likely to be asked before the departure from the Louvre took place. His reply was that they should pass by the church and cemetery of "*Les Innocents*" on the way to the Arsenal, as the more direct road was at the time under repair. Continuing this route, the carriage arrived at the end of the Rue St. Honoré and turned into that of La Ferronnerie, when an interruption occurred. A wain loaded with straw had either broken down or one of the horses had stumbled in front of a drinking-shop known as the "Salamander," and, at the same time, one of the two attendants who alone walked beside the coach had dropped behind to tie his garter, which had become undone. Meanwhile, the Duc d'Épernon had drawn from his pocket a letter from the Comte de Soissons which he handed to Henri to read, when, as the King did so, the coach, in endeavouring to pass by the obstacle in the road, drew close up to the shops, which were principally occupied by vendors of old ironmongery who, for the purposes of their business, had large bulks, or wooden boards, projecting over the narrow footpaths. In front of one of these shops which had for its sign a crowned heart pierced with an arrow, accompanied by a scroll describing this emblem, was a mounting-block, an article common enough then in every street in Paris when all

men and many women coming or going any distance rode on horseback. From off this block there sprang a man, ragged and unkempt, who hurled himself at the King, struck at him with a dagger which glanced off his body between the armpit and the left breast, then struck again and, this time, buried the knife in the victim's heart, one of the largest veins leading from it being severed. Henri fell back in his seat crying, it is said by some writers, "*Je suis frappé,*" and, at the same time, the Duc de Montbazon, taking him in his arms, said, "Sire, what is it?" To which Henri replied twice in a faint voice, "It is nothing," the repetition of the words being almost inaudible.

Ravaillac had accomplished his work. Henri IV. was dead.

It is not strange that the Duc de Montbazon should have asked the question he did, since not one of those in the carriage ever acknowledged that they had seen the blows struck, or even the gleam of the knife as it rose and fell in the hand of the murderer. Yet some there were in that carriage who were loyal and true to Henri, no matter what the others might be. Caumont, Marquis de la Force, loved him; de Lavardin, de Roquelaure and Mirebeau did the same. But d'Épernon, we know, was steeped in treachery to the lips, and de Montbazon was more than suspected of

being badly inclined towards Henri. With these, there may have been a reason for their statement, though, since numbers in the street had seen the deed, it is inexplicable. Did they, or, to speak only of him who was known to be a traitor—did d'Épernon imagine that, for some purpose, Ravaillac had been employed, unknown to him, by those with whom he was in collusion? Or did he see, in this man's sudden appearance on a scene which he had more or less arranged to suit his own purpose, something he had not dared to expect or hope, and did he decide instantly to pretend to be utterly unable to even understand the crime or comprehend how it could have come about? We shall, however, perceive immediately how quick he was to grasp one thing, namely, that in Ravaillac's deed all suspicion would most probably be averted from him and his confederates for ever.

The street became a scene of wild confusion the moment after the murder had taken place. Shivering by the side of the carriage stood the starved, dishevelled form of Ravaillac; a dazed look on the man's face and, it may well be, a dazed feeling in his brain at what he had done. La Force had sprung from the vehicle and was about to run him through with his drawn sword, after crying out to the Baron de Courtomeyer—who, with

many others of the Court, had followed the cortège on horseback from the Louvre—to go on at once to Sully and inform him of the tragedy that had occurred. People were running about excitedly, shouting that the King was slain; heads were thrust out from every window; women had fainted in the street, when, suddenly, from the farther end of it there appeared ten rough, well-armed and ferocious-looking men who cried, "Death to the murderer! Slay him at once! He must die now—on the spot!" A moment later, Courtomeyer rushed at these men while dragging his sword from its sheath, and they instantly disappeared down a side street—never to be seen again.

They had received an order they dared not disobey. Erect, the Duc d'Épernon had faced them; in the tone of command he had been accustomed to use when he was the mignon of Henri III., the tone he would have often used before Henri IV., had he had the courage to do so, he cried, "Harm him not! Your lives for it if you touch him." It was not unnatural that he should thus behave. Ravaillac was too precious to be slaughtered on the scene of his crime, too valuable a witness of the fact that he and d'Épernon had never had any intercourse together, that he had never spoken to d'Épernon, had never touched one sou of the bribes which had gone into the pockets of the ten bravoes

who had, doubtless, been well paid to do that which the actual murderer had done for nothing while anticipating them. The unhappy creature was, indeed, so precious that, instead of handing him over to the persons proper to take charge of him, the Duke first of all incarcerated him in the Hôtel de Retz which was in his possession, and then in his own residence, where he allowed the public to see him, to talk with him, or talk to him, and to extract any information they could from him. D'Épernon could have done no wiser thing —for himself and his colleagues! Ravaillac had become a murderer, but a lie was a thing abhorrent to the religious zealot. He was, therefore, the best witness d'Épernon could have obtained to prove that he had no possible knowledge of Ravaillac's own crime.

On the road back to the Louvre an attempt to revive the King was made by pouring wine into his mouth, but it was useless. Once, at the commencement of the melancholy return journey, an officer of the guard lifted his head in his arms and the eyes opened for an instant, probably owing to the movement caused by the upraising of the corpse. On arriving at the Louvre the Duc de Montbazon and others carried the body to a bed in Henri's private cabinet, whence it was later removed to his own bedroom.

It was to the Duchesse de Montpensier that the

melancholy task fell of breaking the news to the widowed Queen. Of the highest rank, both by her husband's position and her own birth, she had always been one of Marie's most intimate friends since the latter first came to France, and, on this occasion, Madame de Montpensier was sitting chatting with the Queen, while she, who had been distracted earlier by the King's manner ere leaving her, was lying on the couch and was not dressed, nor had her hair been arranged. Hearing a noise of cries and sudden exclamations by many voices in the corridors, she besought the Duchess to go to the door between her bedroom and that of Henri, wherein there was also much excitement, and demand the reason of the tumult. Doing so, the latter opened the door a little—she, too, was *en déshabille*—and, looking out and seeing a number of excited persons in the passages, closed it sharply again.

A moment later the unfortunate Queen had sprung from her couch, her suspicions aroused, and, rushing across the room, she cried, "My child! He is dead!" and then attempted to re-open the door with her own hands, while the Duchesse de Montpensier could only ejaculate through white and trembling lips, "No. No. Your son is not dead." After which, throwing her arms round the Queen, she endeavoured to prevent her from entering the adjacent room. In another instant Marie

had, however, got the door open again, only to stagger back at seeing before her the Captain of the Guard, who muttered hoarsely, " Madame, we are lost." Pushing him aside from where he stood blocking her view of the King's cabinet, she saw her husband's body stretched out, his face " white as marble," and he, as she understood in an instant, dead. Directly afterwards she reeled against the wall and fell into the arms of the Duchess, who, with a maid, placed her on her bed.*

D'Épernon was the first to be allowed entrance and came in muttering that, " perhaps the King was not dead after all ; " and he was followed by de Guise, Le Grand and Bassompierre, who all knelt and kissed the Queen's hand and vowed eternal loyalty and fidelity to her.†

The horror which spread over Paris—and afterwards over the whole of France—as the news became known, the lamentations and mourning, probably exceeded any which have ever been testified in Europe at the

* Bassompierre wrote his description of this scene long afterwards, when he was still a prisoner in the Bastille. It is the most graphic of all the accounts of Marie's reception of the fatal tidings. Richelieu, however, runs him close, though in fewer sentences. Fontenay-Mareuil and Matthieu are both excellent in their way—as they mostly are in all they narrate.

† Dean Kitchen says in his *History of France* (1610–24 period) : " When they came to tell her (*Mary dei Médici*) (*sic*), she showed little astonishment, she feigned no sorrow." This is a strange interpretation of the remarks of all the ambassadors, diarists and memoir-writers of the day.

assassination of a Sovereign. All night, and for several nights following, people refused to go to their beds and walked the streets in groups, or sat round the fountains and on the benches, crying and weeping. Women tore their hair out, it is said; men, explaining to their children what had happened, were heard to exclaim again and again, "What is to become of you? You have lost your father." De Vic, the governor of Calais, died an hour after learning the news; a brave soldier, le Capitaine le Marchant, did the same thing when his son-in-law, Le Jeay, a President of the Law Courts, informed him of what had occurred. Sully sprang from his sick-bed on being told of what had happened, and exclaimed that it was the end of France. A moment later he gave orders for his followers to saddle and mount and escort him to the Louvre. On his way there he was, however, met by some of his friends who implored him to turn back since the Queen could not possibly see him, and because it was rumoured all over Paris that assassins were waiting to make him the next victim.

Determined, however, to proceed, he was met by M. du Jou, a councillor, who said, "Beware for yourself. This strange blow will have terrible successors." At the entrance of the Rue Saint-Honoré a letter to the same effect was put into his hand. At last, at the cross-

ways known as *les Quatre Coins*, Vitry, Captain of the Guard, came up to him in tears. "France is finished," he exclaimed. "Where are you going? Either you will never be allowed to enter the Louvre or, if you are, you will never be allowed to leave it. There will be awful results to this crime. Go back to the Arsenal, there is enough for you to do already." Finally, Sully, recognizing the wisdom of these warnings, took the advice given him. Richelieu, always contemptuous of Sully, terms this conduct ungrateful and pusillanimous. It undoubtedly seems to be so, yet, at the moment, Sully was the first man in France; Henri's son had to be acknowledged as King and Marie to be installed as Regent, and the Louvre was filled with powerful noblemen, every one of whom hated him for his power, his rugged honesty and his rude boorishness. It was in truth a case of the live, savage dog being better than the dead, ferocious lion.

Meanwhile, orders were given for the whole country to assume mourning for the space of two years. The Queen shut herself up in her apartments for forty days, the Royal children were kept equally invisible; none except those whose business rendered their presence necessary in the Louvre was admitted. From every church the bells tolled intermittently by night and day; all Paris, from the Court downwards, was a mass of

sepulchral gloom, while a laugh in the streets, or even indoors, was a thing sternly suppressed by the passers-by or the watch, in one case, and by the master or mistress of the house in the other. A house of mourning in France, and, indeed, in England—where many customs were then strikingly similar to those of our neighbours—was at this time a terribly sad affair.

All apartments, from the grand saloons to the garrets, were hung with black if the head of the family died, and, in a lesser degree, when other members did so. There was a mourning-bed kept for the state, or principal, bedroom, which was thus hung and adorned with inky plumes such as, until recent years in England, were usually to be seen on hearses and mourning-coaches—and in this the succeeding head of the family at once began to sleep for a certain number of days or weeks or months. When the bereaved family did not possess this melancholy piece of furniture, it was borrowed from friends or relatives. The ceilings were covered with black cloth attached below them, the floors were hidden under black carpets and every inch of *parquet* was carefully disguised, while crape was the only wear permitted to any person dwelling in the house, no matter whether ruler or scullion.

This was the custom prevailing among the higher or the wealthier classes, and even, to a certain extent,

among those less well to do ; but, with the great noblesse, or royalty, the period of mourning was a still more solemn and imposing ordeal. With the latter, as was the case with Marie de Médici—and all widowed Queens of France—it was obligatory that the bereaved wife should not leave her private apartments for forty days, or put off her mourning for two years (in Spain a widowed Queen never discarded black), and, although the funereal drapings of the palaces might be relieved somewhat by silver lace, or by melancholy-looking birds or animals of the same metal standing about, no relaxation of any kind could be permitted. Nor were any public fêtes allowed, nor any amusements or music—the theatres, as we have seen, scarcely existed as yet ; dancing became a forgotten exercise or was only practised with the greatest secrecy. The enthralling romances of Mdlle. de Guise (to speak candidly, they are well worth reading now), or the lighter works of d'Aubigné—which are full of valuable information concerning his time—were hidden away, and any young lady caught perusing them during the period of general mourning would have probably received a form of punishment which girls of later centuries would not be inclined to credit.*

* A multitude of French works, too numerous to quote, deal with the customs of mourning in France. In England, the Verney memoirs are illuminating on this as well as other matters of interest.

Meanwhile, special embassies and representatives from every country arrived, and the body of Henri IV., after lying in state for the prescribed length of time, was solemnly interred in the vaults of St. Denis (from which it was, in company with those of other monarchs, torn by the Revolutionists one hundred and eighty-two years afterwards), and his heart was buried in the abbey of La Flèche.

Fate had done its worst, and the most beloved King (as well as the best hated by some) that France has ever known slept in peace.*

It is, however, to the plot—with all its ramifications, the occasional truths and the numerous lies that were told in various quarters, the adventurers and the adventuresses of all ranks and classes—as distinguished from the deed of Ravaillac, that we have now to turn our consideration.

First on the scene comes Jacqueline le Voyer, or la Comans or l'Escoman, as she now began to be

* In the whole of the description of Henri IV. and of his death, I have followed only the best contemporary French writers (principally those named in earlier pages than this), while carefully collating them. To mention the names of all whom I have consulted would require too much space. Moréri, in his great *Dictionnaire Historique*, states that, up to his time (1643-1680), fifty historians and more than five hundred panegyrists and poets had written about Henri IV. How many more have since done so in different countries, and languages, no man can reckon.

termed; the adventuress, *entremetteuse*, *folle*, etc., as she was spoken of—and brave woman and victim of others as she afterwards came to be considered.

In the preceding pages attention has been drawn to her, and it is now important to take up the narrative concerning her proceedings and revelations.

When she first attempted to obtain an interview with Marguerite de Valois, which was eight months after the murder of the King, she had but lately come out of a prison to which she had been sent some two years before through the agency of her husband, who was most anxious to get rid of her. The man had lived upon the money she earned with his consent, no matter how small it was or in what manner gained, and, when this source of existence failed, he had brought a trumpery charge against her which might have been true or false, but, considering the scoundrel's character, was probably the latter. She was now in a deplorable state, without means and almost without clothes—both of which facts told against her later as proving that her last resource was to become what the French term in the case of men, *un diseur de contes*, and in English would mean, in her case, a discoverer of plots; and that she was ready to concoct any story which would obtain her some reward. But, whatever might be her intentions, she approached

Marguerite de Valois after the latter had attended Mass in the Church of St. Victor and implored her to listen to what she had to say.

Marguerite was a very different woman now from what she had been in the days of her youth, when no man who was fairly good-looking and of decent birth could fail to win a response to an admiring glance or a whispered word in praise of her beauty. She had become, indeed, truly religious and devout, charitable to the poor and kindly to all, and was a good and firm friend to the very woman who had taken her place on the throne.

As she once was, she would have spurned this hapless adventuress from her as a pariah ; as she now was, she listened to what the other had to say, the more especially as " La Comans " mentioned that, if she refused to do so, awful and irreparable disaster might fall upon all the Royal family.

What this forlorn creature did tell Marguerite seems, as we unravel the facts, to dispose entirely of the supposition that Ravaillaç was *not* a tool of d'Épernon and Madame de Verneuil ; yet, as will be seen later, such supposition is undoubtedly the right one. The following is the story as " La Comans " is supposed to have afterwards dictated it, as it was published, and as it still remains in the Archives and Trials of France. Before

narrating it, however, it may be well to state that Marguerite summoned Marie and others to hear the recitation offered by " La Comans," and that they did so from behind a heavy tapestry curtain which entirely shielded them from the sight of the person to whom they had come to listen. It is also proper to say that what the Queen (Marie) heard has been supplemented here by what, by order of a Court sitting in the Conciergerie where Jacqueline was soon to be incarcerated, she then stated; which statement was, later, published. The narrative opened by the declaration that, before she was sent to prison by her husband's efforts, she had found the opportunity of being presented to Henriette, Marquise de Verneuil, and, being in want of some position, made herself so useful to that lady and her mother that she had soon become essential to them (incidentally she asserted that she discovered that Henriette was utterly false to the King, and that the young Duc de Guise was her favoured lover). This pleasant state of existence, especially for the narrator, lasted for some months and up to the Christmas of 1608,* at which time the Duc d'Épernon and the Marquise saw fit to attend church together, there to hear a sermon preached by a celebrated Jesuit priest named Gondier, a man

* M. Michelet calls it the year 1606, which is impossible, as we shall see directly.

who frequently reproved his congregation for their sins and once asked Henri from the pulpit "if he ever intended to come and listen to him without bringing his seraglio as well?"

It was, however, "La Comans" suggested, with no fervent religious promptings, nor with any desire for spiritual comfort, that either of this illustrious pair found themselves in the sacred edifice, but, instead, with the full intention of there and then deciding when the long-discussed murder of the King should take place. Jacqueline accompanied the Marquise de Verneuil and was ordered to take a seat in the church in front of the two conspirators so that no other persons in their vicinity could hear what they were saying and, thereby, conclude that the death of the King was decided on.

Thus runs the narrative, but, at this point, it is a strangely involved one. The fact of a third person sitting in front of two others would certainly not prevent the conversation of those others from being overheard in a church crowded with people who came to listen to a fashionable preacher, while, if that third person was to hide the other two from the sight of a portion of the congregation, she should have been seated behind the conspirators and not in front, since those in that position would scarcely turn round to stare at those at their back. Moreover, the selection of a much

frequented church for the purpose of discussing their plans seems a particularly crude performance for a man of the crafty nature of d'Épernon, or for a woman so astute as Henriette, to indulge in, and it was especially so when it is considered that the two could have met in absolute privacy elsewhere. They moved in the same circle, they were both members of the Court; the passages of the Louvre, or their own *salons*, would have afforded them a far better opportunity of discussing their future actions than a church filled with people who were more or less of their own rank, and to whom they were undoubtedly well known. Such, however, is what the narrative states and as such it has to be accepted.

"La Comans" (this portion belongs to her examination before the Premier Président, Achille de Harlay, in the Court formed in the Conciergerie) stated next that, shortly after the Christmas of 1608, she received a letter brought to her by a valet of Balzac d'Entragues—who was none other than the father of the Marquise de Verneuil—in which a man who accompanied the bearer was recommended to her sympathy and, if Balzac d'Entragues did not intend to pay his bill for him, to her charity also. She was also informed that she must bring this stranger into contact with Mdlle. du Tillet, who happened to be a mistress of the Duc d'Épernon (after having desired to fill the same position with

Henri, to which she did not actually attain), and who is described as being ugly, wicked and spiteful.

This stranger was Ravaillac, and, when he appeared before Jacqueline, he was clad in rags. She states that she fed him and bought him new clothes (she appears, therefore, to have herself escaped from the want and poverty which had originally afflicted her) and found him lodgings; he being at her charge for nearly three months. Now, both the rags (*mal vêtu* is her term) and this matter of "nearly three months" have to be carefully borne in mind in reading the interrogatories and answers. The reason for doing so in connection with the clothes the man wore will appear shortly; that in connection with the period of time during which Ravaillac was supported by "La Comans" can be dealt with at once. This reason is, however, only given in the *Mercure François* (Richelieu's term for it in after days, *Un recueil de Mensonges*, should not be forgotten), which "news-sheet" has always been regarded as *suspect* by every French writer who has used it for reference.

Marguerite in her interview with "La Comans" naturally asked the inevitable question: "What was this man like?" and the other, looking round at the late Queen's attendants, indicated one of middle-height with a dark complexion and a black beard. As a matter

of fact, however, Ravaillac was a big, well-built man with dark, reddish-brown hair and a reddish beard. If, therefore, the *Mercure François*—which was always a parasitical Court journal (we have seen that Louis XIII. favoured it with paragraphs written by himself for a reason of his own which the most simple-minded can easily penetrate)—was not ordered or paid to insert this statement as a means of destroying the total credibility of "La Comans"—in fact, if it was true, her whole story falls to the ground. But if, in this case as with most others, it simply gave to the public what it was forced to insert, it refutes nothing that the denunciator affirmed.

Continuing her statement, the woman fell into another error which was, however, a trifling matter. She averred that, in the following spring, the Court went to Chantilly (which was then written and pronounced Gentilly) *after* Easter. But, considerable research having been made by modern writers as to this fact, it has been discovered that the only time at which the Court was at Chantilly for a long period was *before* Easter in the year 1609, "La Comans" being, therefore, accurate in all but the difference of a fortnight. Her evidence, however, shows that the meeting in the church of St. Jean-en-Grève between d'Épernon and Henriette must have taken place in 1608 and not 1606 as M. Michelet states.

After all this, " La Comans " went on to state that she was employed by the Marquise de Verneuil to get into communication with a dependent of hers who had been banished by order of Henri as a man supplying information to his enemies, but who was actually hidden at Verneuil, from which place he was in constant touch with Spain, which country, as " La Comans " stated, was the principal mover and director of the plot to murder Henri ; the Duke and the Marquise being in its pay and Ravaillac in theirs.

On discovering these facts, as she supposed—" supposed " because she was undoubtedly wrong in her surmise with regard to Ravaillac—she determined to reveal the whole plot to the King, and, to do so, she got into contact with a courtier named Chambert and a Mademoiselle de Gournay, who was an adopted daughter of no less a person than the illustrious Montaigne and the one to whose indefatigable zeal is owing the fact that the world possesses a final and complete edition of the works of the great essayist. Mdlle. de Gournay was, however, a lady who fully believed that Henri was held sacred by all as a " wise and enlightened ruler " —which description he undoubtedly deserved—and the Comte de Chambert was a skilled courtier. When, therefore, they saw " La Comans," the first was so terrified at what she heard that she considered she

was in the company of a lunatic or a woman endeavouring to make money out of the revelation of a concocted plot, and the Count refused to have anything whatever to do with their visitor.

Meanwhile, Henriette had heard of what has been termed the indiscretions, namely, the statements, of "La Comans," and the woman was turned over to the service of Mdlle. du Tillet, who was quite capable of keeping a strict watch upon the goings and comings of the other, though her astuteness appears to have failed to perceive that, at the same time, "La Comans" was keeping an equally careful watch upon her. That this was so is evident, since, later, Mdlle. du Tillet was denounced as the person in whose house d'Épernon and Henriette were in the habit of meeting to discuss their plans, and as the person who was also their go-between.

It may naturally be said, as it has been said by many writers since the death of Henri, that, in all this narrative, there is little proof of its truth. Jacqueline le Voyer, or La Comans or d'Escomans, had led a stormy, if not an actually wicked life, and one that was certainly entitled to be called irregular, while she had no single witness to confirm any statement she advanced. Moreover, if the *Mercure François* happened by any out-of-the-way chance to be telling the truth about

her failure to recognize Ravaillac, she was undoubtedly inventing lie after lie to ruin three people if not more, namely, d'Épernon, Henriette de Verneuil and Mdlle. du Tillet. As for Ravaillac, she could scarcely say anything that would injure him, since he was dead. But as he had frequently been backwards and forwards between Angoulême and Paris in his lifetime, and was known as a fanatic who, in dark quarters and places where he harboured, often spoke of petitioning the King to destroy the Huguenots and support the Pope at the peril of being himself destroyed if he did not do so, and as he had evidently struck the fatal blows, the very mention of his name in connection with the others should have been enough to alarm them.

The actions of the woman at the time were, however, openly justified by all that she narrated later, as is plainly to be seen by those who take the trouble of studying them carefully. On Ascension Day of the year 1609, on quitting the house of Mdlle. du Tillet, she came face to face with Ravaillac, the late object of her bounty, who at once informed her without any circumlocution whatever that he had come back to Paris to slay the King. With this statement of hers there disappears any farther declaration on her part which is not capable of corroboration. She goes on to say that immediately

after she had left Ravaillac she sped to the Louvre, sought out a friend of hers who was a waiting-woman to the Queen, and implored her to bring her before her Majesty, saying that she had terrible news to impart, while offering to produce proof of how constant intercourse was taking place between the house where Mdlle. du Tillet dwelt and Spain. Of this visit to the Louvre, if not of her capacity to produce evidence of letters being sent to Spain, ample proof has always existed. Yet—and here we arrive at one of the points which for so long coupled the name of Marie de Médici with the plot of the assassination—the Queen did absolutely nothing. She was at the moment about to set out for Chartres and to Chartres she went, while sending word to "La Comans" that she would receive her on her return in three days' time. But, when the Queen did return, her next action was to set out at once for Fontainebleau, where Henri was ill in bed, and the woman was left to haunt the waiting-rooms of the Louvre, not knowing when Marie would return.

"La Comans" was, therefore, in a dangerous position. Her determination to reveal all that she knew might well lead to her own undoing. D'Épernon and Henriette would accord her short shrift when once they knew that she was likely to denounce them. The former might, she probably thought, be easily tempted

to slay her so that she should not be able to prevent him from killing Henri. Taking counsel with herself, she recognized that her greatest safety lay in confiding in some person of importance who would listen to and protect her. Unfortunately for her plan, however, she sought out and got into communication with a man who was, after d'Épernon—though in a different way—the worst person to whom she could have gone. This was the celebrated Jesuit father, Cotton, a man of whom history has said both good and bad things.* L'Estoile, who had no particular religious antipathies or sympathies, and was, for those days, a large-minded and tolerant man, says that Cotton went to see Ravaillac in prison after he had assassinated Henri and told him to be careful of every word he uttered, and wished to make him believe that he was a Huguenot.† Directly afterwards, L'Estoile goes on to say that Ravaillac declared at his examination after the murder that he had

* Henri offered him the Archbishopric of Arles, and offered to procure also a Cardinal's hat for him, in spite of his being an ardent converter of Protestants. He refused both, some say out of vainglory. A little later he was nearly murdered in his carriage—he said by enraged Protestants. The real attackers were some lackeys whom Cotton had dismissed for insolence.

† It will be seen that L'Estoile is not quite so clear here as ordinarily. The phrase reads as above, though it is capable of being construed as though Cotton wished to persuade the murderer that he himself was a Huguenot without recognizing the fact. It is, however, much more likely that L'Estoile meant that Cotton passed himself off as a Huguenot.

held conferences with another Jesuit father, le père d'Aubigné (who was almost certainly no connection of d'Aubigné, the Huguenot writer, or, if so, was an unrecognized one) ; and that he had shown him the knife with which he intended to do the deed. A little later, in fact, on the next page, the diarist states that a quarrel had arisen at the Council between Loménie (the devoted secretary of Henri) and Cotton, and that the former openly charged the latter and other Jesuits with having instigated the murder of Henri.

It is, however, difficult to believe in the accuracy of this statement, though quite easy to imagine that not only Loménie, but half the people in Paris, believed such to be the case. The reason for doubting its accuracy is that Henri had, of late, sought in every way the goodwill of the Jesuits and, amongst them, none had been more humoured and caressed than Father Cotton, whom Henri had constituted his confessor.

Moreover, he had aided the Jesuits to increase their colleges, had ordered all bishops, mayors and syndics to treat them with gentleness and respect, and to them, and their college of La Flèche, he bequeathed his heart after death. If, therefore, they were absolutely concerned in the plot against his life they would only have been so in obedience to orders they could not venture to disobey—namely, those of Spain.

Whether this were so or not, it is the fact that Jacqueline le Voyer, *dite* " La Comans " or L'Escomans, did not make a particularly good choice in endeavouring to communicate with Cotton. When she arrived at the convent where he dwelt he was out, or said to be so, but his second in command told her that she could see him on the next day. On the next day, however, he had gone to Fontainebleau—in much the same manner as the Queen had gone to the same place to see Henri—and, driven to desperation, the woman told all she had to reveal to Cotton's deputy and implored him to at once communicate with the King. This person treated her, however, with considerable coldness, remarked that such methods required time for consideration, and bade her go away and pray for guidance.

Whatever may have been the hour usually selected by " La Comans " for her prayers, this, at least, did not appear to her a suitable time for the purpose. Her always irascible temper was aroused by these continual evasions and postponements, and she announced to the priest in a very firm tone that she should at once set out for Fontainebleau and, when there, find means to communicate with the King himself. This, however, did not seem to be an undertaking which at all commended itself to Father Cotton's representative, and, consequently, he said that he would spare her the trouble of

doing so, and would, instead, go himself. There is no proof obtainable that he ever went to Fontainebleau for the purpose, and quite as much lack of proof that one word of what "La Comans" could tell ever reached the ears of the King. Meanwhile, no farther opportunity was left to her of making public any more of what she knew, or, as many writers have suggested, of what she only surmised or invented. A day or so after she had left the priest on the understanding that he would at once set out to see the King, she was arrested and thrown into the Hôtel Dieu, then serving as a House of Correction, from which she managed to escape, only to be re-arrested and imprisoned in Le Châtelet. An ignominious charge was brought against her by her husband, who, it has been hinted, was paid to make it—an action of which he was quite capable—and as a result of it she was condemned to death. She, however, struggled valiantly to save herself, appealed against the sentence, asserted that, before it could be carried out, she had means of telling far more than she had as yet divulged, and—which appeared strangely significant in the eyes of most people—obtained an extraordinary revision of her sentence. It was now altered to one which declared that she should be secluded in a convent and that her husband should pay a small sum a year for her maintenance, or take her back as his wife.

Neither of these suggestions were agreeable to that person, and the final result was that, after another appeal for liberty, she found herself free.

Such was the narrative which this woman told briefly to Marguerite de Valois, and more extensively to her judges, after she had been again arrested and, on this occasion, sent to the Conciergerie—principally on the demand of d'Épernon. For those who had been behind the hangings with Marguerite and Marie were not likely to remain silent and, even had they been requested to do so, of which there is no suggestion, did not comply with the request. De Harlay, an upright and honest judge, justly remarked that what "La Comans" had advanced was sufficient to bring all whom she inculpated to their death, and that, consequently, if what she stated was untrue, she merited the same fate herself.

Indeed, "La Comans" had gone even farther than has been set down here, since she insinuated that d'Épernon and the Marquise de Verneuil had bribed her husband to bring his charge against her, so that she should be imprisoned and deprived of all opportunity of testifying farther. As an alternative, however, she stated that, if it was not they who obtained her first incarceration, then that incarceration was due to Father Cotton who no sooner heard what she had told his

brother priest and representative than he at once caused her to be arrested.

The result of this interrogation and of her depositions (they are always spoken of as having been published by her, though, as a matter of fact, they were published by the orders of the Parliament and, as many persons have surmised, were arranged, or "edited," to suit the purposes of what was at best a mock trial) was as terrible as any punishment that could befall a living creature. She was ordered to be imprisoned within four walls for the rest of her life, and, shortly after her condemnation, she was sent to a prison named *les Filles répenties*, where she was immured in a cell surrounded by an iron cage so arranged that she could neither speak to anyone nor be spoken to. As for those whom she accused, they were all acquitted.

As regards this statement of Jacqueline le Voyer, or, in other words, the printed and published statement issued by the Parliament four years after the death of Henri—which may have been complete and exact, but was, in all probability, garbled and distorted—no attempt to analyse it is made here for the present. There remains, however, still another person's statement, portions of which are yet in existence and the whole of which has been carefully handed down to their successors by those who were the leading writers of history of the day,

one of whom was Matthieu, the re-appointed* Historiographer Royal. This second statement now to be presented will, as the reader must soon perceive, go far to corroborate in many ways the denunciations of the unfortunate Jacqueline, and also, in many others, to refute, or, at least, cast doubt on, them. Later on, when both are carefully scrutinized, some resemblances of an extraordinary nature will be apparent; so apparent, indeed, that it is difficult not to believe that the second was partially a copy of the first, or, rather, that the second was made to coincide with the first, the opportunity for doing so being, as we shall see, easily found.

This second denouncer was one of that class of men whom dramatists and romancers of all ages, from Shakespeare, Calderon and Lope de Vega to Mdlle. de Scudéry, Defoe, and many others, have loved to portray, namely, a man who lived by his sword, who roamed from land to land offering it to whichever chief would pay the highest price for it, and, when the business of war was slack, was not unwilling to put that sword to uses that were not the noblest for which it was originally made. Swashbuckler, bravo, *matamore, bretteur, mangia-ferro,* etc., are the names, among several others, by which these

* By Louis XIII. Molière speaks, in *Sganarelle,* of Matthieu's works as *ouvrages de valeur.*

men have mostly been distinguished, and although, in the present case, there is no particular evidence that this one was entitled to any of these epithets, he was undoubtedly an adventurer in a certain sense of the word.

His name was Pierre Dujardin ; his *nom de guerre*, M. le Capitaine la Garde. His warlike exploits had been considerable. Once a soldier under the romantic Biron, he had wandered far and fought with impartiality in whatever army possessed the best-filled war-chest. Now, when he makes his first appearance in connection with the plots fomented so frequently against Henri, he is to be seen at Naples, where he has disembarked from a felucca which has brought him from Turkey. His sword had but recently been hired by the Turk, and its owner, having fulfilled the services for which he was paid, was next about to proceed on another voyage to Marseilles and to ride thence to Paris. Naples was, however, in those days—as it still is in a more subdued manner—one of the most delightful places in Europe. The Spanish Viceroy was a man of hospitable habits, and the same may be said of the Neapolitans ; while what would be especially dear to the heart of the French adventurer was the fact that the place was full of his own countrymen of different shades of politics, means and habits. Old Leaguers were here who either would

not or could not live longer under the rule of their conqueror; so, too, were many French Roman Catholics, lay and clerical, and several diplomatic representatives of other countries.

In this society La Garde instantly found himself at home, and the more so as he had not been ashore many hours ere he stumbled across an old friend who had once been the secretary of his early commander, Biron. This gentleman made him welcome at a table reserved for his daily use at an Ordinary, and he was also the guest of another friend who, when "The League" was powerful, had been the Lieutenant of the Châtelet, in Paris. Shortly after La Garde had joined this company he observed a man enter who was warmly received and treated with great cordiality by all present, and he states in his factum (from which much of this account is derived), that the new-comer was well-dressed in a "scarlet violet" costume and that his name was Ravaillac. (This is a considerably different account of Ravaillac's apparel from that of "La Comans," who states, as we have seen, that the future assassin of the King of France was *mal vêtu* when she met him.) Without any hesitation, the man, according to La Garde, plainly said in reply to a question from one of the company that he brought letters from the Duc d'Épernon to the Viceroy, and that, directly after he had received

an answer to them, he intended to return to France and assassinate the King, which deed he made no doubt of accomplishing easily.

La Garde makes no mention of observing any surprise on the part of his friends at this portentous news, so that, if he had not, ere this, described the company in which he mixed as one composed of " malcontents," we might easily gather that such was the case.

Continuing his statement, La Garde goes on to say that, a few days later, the ex-Lieutenant of the Châtelet requested him to go in his company to pay a visit to a Jesuit priest named Le Père Alagona, a man of good family who was uncle to the Duc de Lerma, lately Prime Minister of Spain, or, rather, of Philip III. of Spain. After some conversation on the subject of La Garde's means, political feelings and adventures, the soldier was somewhat startled by the priest suggesting to him that he should undertake Ravaillac's task of slaying Henri, since the other would only perform the business like a footpad, while he would do it like a cavalier. The priest also stated that, for remuneration, La Garde should be made a Grandee of Spain and receive a sum of fifty thousand crowns.

As has been said, La Garde, though more or less of a mercenary and free-lance (as, at this time, were thousands of men in Europe whose sword was their only

fortune), had never had any charge brought against him of being a cut-throat or murderer, and it is not, therefore, surprising that he should have demanded eight days for reflection—presuming, of course, that his story is true and that the offer was ever made at all. Meanwhile, he states that he consulted a man known to him, of the name of Zamet (brother of the Zamet who was often spoken of as an early lover, as well as, eventually, the poisoner, of Gabrielle d'Estrées, who, as has been shown, was probably not poisoned by any one), but omits to say what advice he received on the subject. He, however, tells us instead that he at once set out for Rome where he saw the French ambassador and informed him of the offer, the ambassador instantly sending on the information to de Villeroy, a Secretary of State in Paris.

Arrived himself in Paris, La Garde says he saw Henri at Fontainebleau, who told him that the same story from the French ambassador at Rome, and from Zamet, had already reached him, but that he had by now so much reduced his enemies and rendered them powerless that there was little left for him to fear from their efforts. Henri did not, however, offer any reward to La Garde for his services and, war breaking out in Hungary and Poland, the adventurer, who seems by this time to have been without means, betook himself to those countries

and did not revisit the Capital until after the murder of the King.

Returning again to Paris, he had then another tale to tell, and, this time, with a credible witness to confirm it, namely, the Duc de Nevers. He related that, on passing by Metz (which was again under the governorship of d'Épernon, Louis XIII., or, rather, the Queen Regent, having restored that office to him), he was attacked by the soldiers of the garrison, received twenty wounds in various parts of his body, and was flung into a ditch where he was left for dead. On recovering consciousness he dragged himself to Mézières, where he encountered the Duc de Nevers, who brought him in safety to Paris. That he had received the wounds was visible to all eyes, and the Duke's testimony corroborated his own.

After this experience La Garde considered that the time had come for him to receive some compensation for his various services—he being again without means—and he made an appeal to the "Royal Council" for a grant sufficient to keep him from poverty, which appeal was at once rejected. Irritated at this, he stated that he was in possession of several secrets concerning the death of the late King, and also of the names of all those who had compassed it, and he now addressed his request to the États-Généraux—which, as it

happened, were then (1614) about to sit for the last time for a hundred and seventy-five years, namely, not until the period of the outbreak of the French Revolution. The result was that he was again refused, but was afterwards offered the small and not-at-all lucrative post of controller-general of the beer tax, which he at once rejected as unworthy of him. The result of this refusal was that he was thrown into the Bastille.

So far La Garde had obtained but a poor recompense for any of the services which he considered he had performed, both in warning Henri of his danger before his death, or in attempting to denounce those who had plotted that death—and it was some considerable time ere he received any consolation for what he was now to suffer. He had remained for nine months in the Bastille, where, he says, no attempt was made to examine him or in any way to discover, or prove or disprove, whatever he might have to testify. Following on this he was removed to the Conciergerie—where "La Comans" had previously been imprisoned!—and was then brought before a Court constituted to inquire into what he had to state with regard to the parricide committed on the late King ("parricide" being the legal term), and, if necessary, to set the law in motion against those who might be found guilty.

The trial, or, perhaps, it should be said, the investigation into the charges made by La Garde was almost as unfavourable to him as the preceding one had been to "La Comans." The Court appears to have acted with a considerable amount of justice towards the latter on that occasion, as it did, though in a still more considerable degree, towards the former, it being in both cases much biased against the Duc d'Épernon, who had, indeed, never behaved towards any of the great representatives of Justice in a manner calculated to win their good opinion. At the moment of all the excitement attendant on the assassination of Henri, he had forced his way into the Council Chamber booted and spurred and with his sword by his side. Then, after informing the members of it that they were at once to elect Marie as Regent, he laid his hand upon the hilt of his weapon and exclaimed, "This blade is still in its sheath, but if the election is not at once made it, and thousands of others in France, will instantly be drawn."

Later, at the time when he and the Marquise de Verneuil were summoned to appear at the examination of "La Comans" with regard to her charges against them, he approached the President and asked him the latest news of the affair, to which the plain-spoken old man replied, "I am not your purveyor of news, but your judge." On d'Épernon then endeavouring to explain

that he had merely asked him, as a friend, for information, the stout-hearted President replied, "I have no friends" (he probably meaning where duty was concerned). "Be content, you will see that I shall do you justice."

Notwithstanding, however, the unpopularity of d'Épernon, which unpopularity extended to the overbearing and grasping Henriette, the charges of La Garde were repudiated and he returned to his cell, there to pass five more years of misery and, as far as the world in general was concerned, to be entirely forgotten. Yet it would seem that, if he were neglected, there were those still in existence who knew how to make a profit out of him. Some enterprising printer-publisher had obtained the full notes of his answers and accusations when he was before the Court that sat to inquire into his charges, and his factum was now published in the usual fashion, the edition of fourteen hundred copies being at once sold out. It was helped to this successful issue by the assistance of several writers and pamphleteers, as well as by critics of more successful authors than themselves, who, hating all above them, were only too pleased to be able to attack, or assist in an attack on, their betters.

The success of this document had, consequently, an effect on La Garde's circumstances of which he had

probably not even ventured to dream, no matter what hopes he may have cherished of its procuring him his pardon—which, nevertheless, he now obtained. Following on this he was informed that, in consideration of his military exploits—which had rarely been performed on behalf of France !—the King had been pleased to accord him a yearly pension for life of six hundred livres (about thirty pounds).

After this signal proof of Court favour, and one of so opposite a nature to the misfortunes he had lately suffered, La Garde may well have been led to suppose that there were those in existence who considered it better to purchase his silence than to punish his outspokenness. And, if he did not indulge in some such reflections as these, he was probably the only person in Paris to whom similar ones had not presented themselves very clearly when they heard of his ultimate success.

CHAPTER VI

THE EXPOSITION

IT is now requisite to attempt, not so much to sift the evidence of the two informers whose characters and denunciations have been briefly described, as to endeavour to weigh carefully what object, if any, the accused persons would have in entering into a plot to slay the King; and to determine whether it was more to their interest or against their interest that Henri IV. should cease to exist.

Combined, however, with this attempt another has to be made, namely, one in which the credibility of both Jacqueline le Voyer and La Garde must be considered, and a comparison instituted between the evidence of the one and the other, and—which, perhaps, is not very far to seek—the reason discovered that prompted each of them to either divulge what they knew or to assert what they pretended to know.

Until now, the stories of these informers have been set down here as they exist in many accounts of the day, in the pages of the most eminent historians of the

moment at which the murder was committed, in collections of papers dealing with the period, which are now in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and in other public libraries, and in the memoirs of prominent men of the time. The testimonies of both informers are, indeed, to use the language in which they are told, *bien documentés!* But, when we come to reasons that will justify those testimonies, we find few French writers, either of the past or present, who have indulged in much argument on the matter, while in England, or in the works of English writers, it is not too much to say that we find little mention of the affair, and certainly none at all worth considering.

In France, the late M. Auguste Poirson has, in his fine *Histoire du Règne de Henri IV.*, given us some speculations on the subject, but he has been more affirmative, more denunciatory, than aught else. Indeed, after using the facts stated by his predecessors as bearing on the probability of there being any plot against Henri in which d'Epernon and the Marquise were the principals and Ravaillac the tool, he dismisses the whole thing as false and unlikely; and bases his opinion on the fact that "La Comans" was a "*femme décriée pour ses désordres et pour ses infamies.*" As to La Garde, he describes him as the "son of a plasterer"—which is certainly not a reason for destroying a man's credi-

bility !—and terms him an adventurer who had usurped the title of Captain and was desirous of making his fortune by seeking it by aid of his sword in all the Courts of Europe. If, however, such a career as this in the days of Henri and our own Elizabeth, or of James I., was sufficient to destroy the possibility of any man's word or evidence being credible, one hardly knows to whom one could point as trustworthy among the masses of men in England, France, and elsewhere who set out to seek their fortunes in those days. In our own land, Raleigh, Captain John Smith, Frobisher, Drake, Hawkins —among the most distinguished—had done as much ; in France there were as many who sought wealth or renown, or both, in various directions, though principally in Europe. In Spain, Cervantes had been a soldier and fought in the great naval battle of Lepanto, where he lost his arm ; he was captured by a corsair and became a slave in Algiers for five years, after which he served again as a soldier and was then a starving dramatist until he won everlasting fame by his great work, *Don Quixote*. Lope de Vega sailed in the Armada ; Calderón had been a soldier, the manager of a court theatre and a Canon of the Cathedral of Toledo before he became the leading dramatist of Spain and the " poet of the Inquisition."

The disordered life of the female witness and the

adventurous one of the man need not, therefore, be considered as true reasons for impugning their credibility any more than they need be considered as likely to affirm it. There are many women leading the most reckless lives who are not thieves, and there are many men who are thieves and outcasts who would refuse to swear away the lives of others.

When, however, the late eminent historian states that the woman hoped to build up a fortune by denouncing the Marquise de Verneuil to Marie de Médici, who, as Regent, would then be able to wreak vengeance on the mistress who had stood between her and her husband, he comes nearer the mark, though he does not necessarily hit it fairly. Also, with regard to the man, when he states that he was poor and, consequently, was eager to discover a means whereby he should be provided for during the rest of his life, he does not fall far short of the mark. At the same time, a great part of what La Garde states was, if not the actual truth, that which all people believed. In France, no one who was in touch with the events of the day, or was "in the movement," doubted for one moment that the Duc d'Épernon and the Jesuits were intriguing with Spain so that the latter should regain her ancient power over the rest of the Continent; a power that, since Henri became King of France, had been most seriously

diminished in spite of his early endeavours to secure the friendship of that country.

Of those persons whose names have been associated with the plot, and three of whom were accused by "La Comans" and La Garde, four stand out prominently, namely, the Queen, d'Épernon, Henriette, Marquise de Verneuil, and Ravaillac. As regards the former, the charge of complicity in such a plot may be dismissed in a few words. Nothing she could gain, not even the Regency, could be of any value in comparison with what she would lose by her husband's death. Neither could jealousy have produced any promptings in even the heart of the "vindictive Florentine" towards the murder of Henri, since, according to human impulses, it would have been against the rival and not the object of the rivalry that vengeance would have been hurled. The charge that, as has been mentioned, was whispered against Marie of having entertained ideas of removing Henriette from her path was believed because it was a probable one, because it formulated a natural possibility. But to charge her with destroying, or endeavouring to destroy, the man whose existence gave her all that a woman could desire or obtain in point of splendour, while leaving the hated rival alive, was absurd.

As regards Henriette, reasons have also been produced to prove that neither would she have taken a part in any

plot to murder her lover, since she also received benefits and advantages from him of which his death would deprive her. He lavished large sums of money on her; she had an allowance that was actually drawn from the funds of the State, and, as the *chère amie* of the King, she had great influence, while, strange as it may appear to us, she was, after the Queen, the most envied woman in France. Consequently, those who scout the suggestion that she would ever have consented to take a part in the murder of the King have much logic on their side, logic that seems at first to be almost unanswerable. Yet but a little reflection serves to show that an answer is easily to be found.

Marie de Médici, in spite of her great position, had never been able to hold her own against the Marquise in the heart of Henri; the latter had, indeed, in all but rank and standing, reduced the Queen to a cipher. But, supposing that this volatile admirer of women should still remain stable in his latest passion of all, namely, that for the Princesse de Condé, and that he should force on a divorce between her and her husband and between himself and his wife, what then would be Henriette's own position? Although not yet old—she was, it will be remembered, but twenty-seven at the death of Henri—she was old in comparison with the young and handsome daughter of the great house of de Mont-

morency, who, most undoubtedly, would soon make extremely short work of a mistress who interfered between her and the King after he had become her husband. "*La grosse banquière*," "the Florentine woman," who was nearing thirty when she was married and was nearly forty then, might have been powerless against the favourite's charms, her insulting demeanour and violent temper, but was it to be supposed that the young Princess of sixteen, and a youthful Queen, would allow herself to be superseded by the mistress who already suffered to some extent from the worst calamity that can befall a once-loved woman, the calamity of having grown stale and wearisome?

In such a case as this, what would become of her? The Court would be closed to her, her allowance would undoubtedly cease; there would remain nothing for her to do but to retire to the estates Henri had bestowed on her, and, with the money she had extorted from him, vegetate there until the end of her days.

But, on the other hand—with Henri dead! With the King gone and Marie de Médici still undivorced and Regent of France, as she would undoubtedly be if once crowned; with Charlotte de Montmorency still no more than the wife of the poor, plain—though highly-placed—Condé, could not Henriette still draw large profits from the position she had once held and to which she had

sold herself for profit alone? Might she not, as the ostensible friend of the Queen, whom, in her heart, she hated and despised—while supported, as she knew she would be, by the arch-schemer and traitor, d'Épernon—so guide and rule that Queen as to improve still further her position, still draw her allowance, still add to the wealth she already possessed?

It is not asserted in these pages that this reasoning actually took place in the mind of the Marquise de Verneuil; it is only suggested—remembering her crafty nature and her cupidity—that it may well have done so. She had intrigued and plotted against Henri; earlier she had schemed to gain him for her lover; she had been, if all accounts are true, false to him behind his back; she was, at the moment, the friend and ally of d'Épernon and of his mistress, du Tillet, both of whom were in constant communication with Spain. It was to her interest that, sooner than she should be discarded for a younger and handsomer woman backed up by all the power of a great family, and by, above all, the rank of queen and the possession of the hold which a young girl can so often obtain over a doting man nearing old age, the man himself should be removed.

For the Duc d'Épernon as many reasons can be advanced for treachery on his part as can be advanced on the part of the Marquise de Verneuil. By vice

almost incredible he had risen from a humble position to the post of pander to the most ignoble King (Henri III.) who had ever ruled France. A mignon of that King, he had attained to immense fortune and high rank, and had become engaged to the sister-in-law of his master at that master's request. He had, indeed—under the wretched creature enslaved by foul habits and superstitious fanaticism which he imagined to be religion, and interested in cooking and larding filets for his courtiers, in cutting their hair for them and in turning his bedroom into a lying-in home for his dogs—been almost king himself. But, when the blow came, when Henri III. fell beneath the knife of Jacques Clément and Henri IV., that was to be, appeared triumphant and with the crown of France as certain to adorn his brows as anything in the world could be certain, it seemed to d'Épernon that his occupation would soon be gone. Reflection, however, undoubtedly brought some comforting thoughts to his mind. He had fought with the League against Henri ; he now vowed to fight for and with him ; yet, still, there remained a deeper, sweeter task to be attempted. He could also betray him. We have seen that he did not fail in this resolution : in truth, he never failed in it. He hated the new-comer, the man who was not only the successor by inheritance of the now defunct Valois race, but, also, by the nomination of Charles IX.,

and even of the miserable Henri III., as well as by his superb prowess and strategy in the field of battle. He likewise hated him because he possessed the most exasperating power one person can possess in the eyes of another who is attempting to deceive him or her. Henri had the power to see through d'Épernon and mistrust him, and he did not hesitate to let the latter perceive that such was the case. Doing so, he removed d'Épernon's charge of the infantry from him and also his governorship of Metz—which entirely broke his power to render any assistance to Spain in case of an outbreak of war. He ordered him to retire to Loches, another of his governments, and it was only gradually that the intriguer was able to creep back into a kind of subdued and much reduced favour with Henri, and to be at his side on the day that he was assassinated —a position which, as has been shown in the description of that assassination, it was almost imperative that he should occupy.

At the first blush, the statement of Jacqueline le Voyer seems, when compared with that of La Garde, to be strongly corroborated by the latter. She averred that it was at Christmas of 1608 that she was taken to the Church of Saint-Jean-en-Grève, and, while covering the Marquise de Verneuil from the curiosity of the congregation, overheard the arrangements made for the

assassination of Henri when a suitable time occurred. This statement—putting aside the unlikelihood of a church being selected as a fitting place for such a scheme to be broached between the two conspirators who could at any moment have met in a dozen secret ones—might well have been true if the characters of the two accused are remembered.

Later, the witness stated that she received orders to shelter Ravaillac and to bring him into contact with Mdlle. du Tillet, the bitter and scheming mistress of the chief conspirator, d'Épernon—a proceeding which also fits in well with the main suggestion of a plot.

So far, so good, since La Garde on his part tells a story of how, a little earlier than the date when the woman sheltered Ravaillac, namely, at or about Ascension Day in 1609, he encountered the man at Naples and heard him openly announce that, after seeing the Spanish Viceroy, he was about to proceed to Paris to slay Henri. Here, therefore, the confirmation changes from one side to the other ; this declaration of La Garde's being corroborated by that of " La Comans," who had stated that letters were being sent from Mdlle. du Tillet's house, and from the house of the Marquise, to Spain, of which country Naples was a possession.

But, already, when we have only examined these two statements side by side, we become plunged in a labyrinth

of doubt and suspicion. At periods near to one another La Garde sees Ravaillac arrive clad in a "scarlet and violet"—or a scarlet-violet dress—and take his place at a table amongst men who, whatever of evil there might be in their lives, were still of some position. Consequently Ravaillac must have left Naples a little later, crossed the Alps and reached Paris—a journey that is not a cheap one in these days, and that, in those days, was a very expensive one—he being, when in Paris, to use "La Comans'" own words, *mal vêtu. Mal vêtu!* yet still a man supposed to be employed by one of the richest peers in France in conjunction with a woman who had been the King's favourite for ten years, and who was as grasping as a harpy in the accumulation of wealth. A man employed by those who represented Spain and were empowered to offer fifty thousand crowns and the rank of a grandee to any assassin of the French King!

The thought has occurred to many, and it arises now as these lines are penned—did Jacqueline le Voyer ever see Ravaillac clad in rags, or La Garde ever see him clad in scarlet and violet, or did either of them ever lay eyes on him before the deed was done? If so, it must have been the woman and not the man who saw him, for she alone describes the unhappy wretch "in his habit as he lived."

But one doubt often leads to another, and from many doubts there sometimes springs a shrewd suspicion of what is actual fact.

The woman was in prison, in the first instance, from the end of July until some months after the murder of the King, and this has often been advanced as a fact which precludes her from having seen Ravaillac, who only reached Paris again a week or so before he assassinated the King; and that, consequently, her story of succouring him, of taking him to Mdlle. du Tillet, of seeing him in rags and of helping him to obtain new clothes, was a trumped-up one. But this need not be by any means the case. Ravaillac, as we shall see later, had often been in Paris, while frequently making the journey on foot from Angoulême—a tremendous one of two hundred miles as the crow flies—and generally doing so with a view to obtaining an interview with the King and petitioning him to be a true friend and worthy servant of the Pope and a bitter enemy to his old co-religionists whom he had abandoned.

But, as regards the story of his being poorly clad, she could scarcely have failed to describe him thus accurately, even though she should have been in prison from five years before the crime until five years after it, and have never laid eyes on the man. All Paris, all France, indeed, all Europe, were still ringing with the hideous

deed when she stepped outside the prison doors ; pictures of Ravaillac were in every shop-window ; numbers had seen him on the fatal day ; descriptions of him abounded in the pamphlets and brochures of which frequent mention has been made—at his execution alone was he clad in the garb of the doomed and was different from what he had ever been. Had she not been able to obtain a description of this man before she had been free an hour, she would have had to be both blind and deaf.

It is, however, also quite possible that La Garde never saw Ravaillac, and almost certain—indeed, absolutely certain—that he never saw him in Naples, for the simple reason that the man was never there. His movements for the last year of his life were traced, after the murder, with unerring exactness ; he had no money for rich suits of clothes, or for dining at taverns and ordinaries ; he never had any—for an equally simple reason ; namely, that he was no hired assassin in the pay of wealthy men and women. The passage across France, across the Alps, and from the Alps to the southern portion of Italy, was far beyond the possibilities of the man who begged outside churches, who was unable to pay for his room at the most miserable of taverns* for more than a night or so, and who had to steal the weapon

* It was opposite the church of St. Roch and bore the sign of "*Les trois Pigeons.*"

with which he accomplished his purpose. Nor, indeed, was he a man who was likely to have been made welcome in their midst by the well-to-do exiles and men of rank at Naples who were opposed to Henri, or even to be allowed to join them at their table.

Yet La Garde, mixing amongst this company as he undoubtedly did, was almost certain to have heard much, if not all, of what was going on in the way of conspiracy as well as of what plots were being hatched in Naples. The rest would be easy. He had but to arrive in Paris himself, which he did soon after he had heard of these plots, and attempt to reveal them to Henri, Sully and others, and, when the time came for him to be interrogated—which did not occur until after the King's death—to tack on to them the, by then, widespread name of the murderer.

Presuming, too, that La Garde had obtained a very shrewd knowledge of the fact that d'Épernon was a prime—indeed, the prime—mover in the conspiracy, what would be more likely than, on getting away from Metz, the place where the Duke was again absolute, he should mention him as the man who had caused him to be attacked; or that he should allow the inference to be drawn, or should artfully foster its being drawn, that the attack had been made with the purpose of silencing him for ever? It is true that La Garde had many

wounds upon him when discovered by the Duc de Nevers and that he had also dragged himself to Mézières, but such things as these have been heard of before and since. Men have often wounded themselves with the intention of creating an impression that the wounds have been inflicted by others, while any man can simulate the appearance of being injured and of staggering along a road in a pitiful condition.

Allowing, however, that this was all part of a system which the adventurer had imagined with a view to obtaining money, or employment, as a reward for his knowledge and the sufferings which that knowledge had entailed upon him, he had, nevertheless, adopted the very worst course which he could pursue. For, if he had really seen Ravaillac, or, at the time of the assault made on him, had ever heard of him, the very mention of his name and his determination to slay Henri would have produced for La Garde as large a reward from d'Épernon as he could possibly desire. The Duke would have instantly grasped the fact that there was in existence a man who, through his morbid fanaticism, was prepared to perform a deed for which he required no pay; a man who would do for him and his companions all that he was being paid large sums by Spain for the performance thereof, while himself paying smaller sums to the actual hired performers; a man who, not

knowing d'Épernon, could never shield himself behind his powerful presence or inculpate him in the slightest degree. But, if the attack at Metz was actually made on La Garde, he had not then, he could not have, this powerful card in his hand, for, as has been said, the simple reason that it did not exist. It never existed until Ravaillac's name was, after the murder was perpetrated, the one most widely known in Europe for a time.

It is scarcely to be doubted that this explanation is the true one: that La Garde did obtain at Naples the knowledge of an actual plot being fomented against Henri, but could not, at the same time, have learnt any information concerning the future murderer, who did not play a part in that plot. For corroboration of this, we have but to suppose that Henri paid no attention to La Garde's story—if he ever heard it, as La Garde states—because Ravaillac's name could not, at that period, have been mentioned in connection with it, and because the only conspirators of whom La Garde could speak were in the Spanish dominions and out of the reach of Henri. The King almost invariably ignored the plots against him because, probably, he knew that they were always in existence, and also because he was aware that, sooner or later, one of them must be successful. But he was not foolhardy, and, if La Garde could *then*, at the inter-

view, have mentioned the name of Ravaillac and have stated that the man had left Naples for Paris determined on murdering Henri, he would, undoubtedly, have caused a hunt to be made which must surely have unearthed him.

With "La Comans" the same argument may well apply. The *confidante* of the Marquise de Verneuil, the go-between of her mistress and Mdlle. du Tillet; the woman who must have overheard, in true waiting-woman fashion, the conversations between d'Épernon and the others—even putting aside as unveracious the meeting in the church of Saint-Jean-en-Grève—would have learnt much. In her case, therefore, as in that of La Garde, she had but to tack on to her story the name of Ravaillac, after he had become the actual assassin, to give the necessary finishing touch of verisimilitude to the narrative. The only difference of any importance in the story of the two informers is that she was right in her description of Ravaillac's appearance and La Garde was wrong. But her opportunities of being accurate were the greater. She came out of prison soon after the murder; La Garde did not go into prison until the crime had almost sunk into that oblivion which settles inevitably over the most appalling and exciting episodes that astound and shock the world for a

time. And, if no knowledge had come to the man (who was in Hungary or Poland at the moment of the assassination) of the needy circumstances of Ravaillac, he would probably be led to describe him as being handsomely clad, since he would naturally suppose that the tool of high-born and wealthy conspirators would hardly be dressed like a scarecrow or be without money in his pocket.

Such are the doubts which those who read carefully the factums of Jacqueline le Voyer and La Garde cannot but feel rising in their minds: there remain, however, many facts which go far towards causing thoughtful inquirers to recognize that there is much to be said in favour of the evidence of both these persons. Let us again regard the case of the woman. The whole of her testimony is skilfully dovetailed: save and except the comparison of Ravaillac with Marguerite's serving-man whom he did not actually resemble, it is pieced together almost as closely as a child's wooden map or box of bricks, while even the mistake of "La Comans," or rather the reason why and how she made it, is easy of explanation. She went into the Conciergerie in June, 1609, and there she remained until the early summer of 1610, a period of time embracing the formation of the last, and the almost successful, plot against Henri as well as the perpetration

of the crime by one outside that plot. But, during that period, Ravaillac had also been a prisoner in the Conciergerie ; it was in it that he was put to the torture with a view to extorting a confession from him, and it was from it that he went forth to be torn to pieces by horses and to have his offending hand chopped off and burnt before his eyes. In those days, however, and for many years afterwards, life was extremely lax in French prisons ; so long as the prisoners were safe within the walls but little heed was taken of what they did or where they were ; it was sufficient that they were held fast. It is, therefore, highly probable that the other prisoners, with " La Comans " among them, may have obtained a view of the man, and it is possible that it was thus that the woman may have seen him " *mal vêtu,*" though this is not altogether certain, since his clothes were supposed to have been torn off his back by the crowd when he was arrested the moment after the assassination. The story of his crime, however, would have reached their ears, since there was often a certain amount of good-fellowship between the warders and the prisoners, even down to the days of the Revolution ; in some way the news of the murder would have certainly filtered through the walls and have aroused a desire in those prisoners, who were often harmless, unfortunate people, to see so horrible a culprit. But as

THE CONCIERGERIE AND THE TOUR DE L'HORLOGE in 18th Century.

[*Facing p.* 302

the Conciergerie was to the end of its use, so it was in the seventeenth century, and so it had been from far earlier ages—a gloomy, darksome hole, its corridors and passages lighted only by rays of light that stole through the openings in the day-time, and by miserable lanthorns at night—when they were lighted at all.* Consequently, if "La Comans" ever saw Ravaillac, she probably did so—since *he* would scarcely be allowed to roam about at large—when he was going to his torture, and then only saw him indistinctly. Her mistake was, therefore, not a very serious one, as the serving-man of Marguerite de Valois, whom "La Comans" indicated as resembling him, had a dark beard and Ravaillac had a dark red-brown beard, while the fact that the serving-man was short and puny and Ravaillac tall and muscular, might, if it were necessary to do so, be disposed of by considering that the wretched creature was on his way to or from the torture-chamber and had already been half-killed by the infuriated crowd who witnessed his terrible deed; neither of which occurrences would be calculated to make him appear at his full height or strength.

Some of this argument has been broached before

* It is interesting to read what an Englishman and a philanthropist, John Howard, had to say of the *Conciergerie* so late as 1776: "The dungeons are dark and infected. A new infirmary has been constructed having beds which now contain *only one sick person* at a time."

by Richelieu's detestation, *Le Mercure François*, and we may consequently join hands with the eminent statesman in believing that it is not, therefore, trustworthy. Sometimes, however, the biggest liars drop into the truth by accident, and, although it is not to be doubted that this statement was issued by the "newspaper" with a view to disparaging any evidence given by "La Comans" that was, in other respects, only too accurate, we may well accept this as truthful reasoning. We can the better do so, since the argument itself is of no particular value. What the woman knew, she knew from sources that could not be impugned; whether Ravaillac had a black beard or a dark brown one, or whether he was tall or short, matters not a jot, while the manner in which she might easily obtain other particulars on leaving her prison has already been suggested. Like La Garde's story of the attack upon him by d'Épernon's soldiers near Metz, or his description of Ravaillac's costume of scarlet and violet, her own was but an added detail that might well embellish the whole narrative, as a clever painter embellishes a portrait with a suitable background, an actor his part with suitable gestures and glances, or a stage-manager a play with good scenery and costumes. It is, however, proper that the incident, itself a detail, should be told here.

It is when we come to the punishment of "La Comans" that we recognize how terrible must have been the knowledge possessed by the woman, judging by the sentence passed on her, and also by the pains taken to prevent her testimony from ever becoming accurately known. "Accurately" because, though her factum was published, as was that of La Garde, it was undoubtedly but a mangled account of all that she had testified, while it is highly probable that much had been inserted to which she never testified at all. No one can read the memoirs of the Marquis, afterwards Duc, de la Force, who was colonel of the bodyguard, and, in that capacity, present at the murder; or the *Méthode pour étudier l'histoire* of Langlet-du-Fresnoy, without believing this to be so, or, if they cannot do this, without believing the extraordinary actions of the judges when her fate was decided upon. She was condemned to perpetual imprisonment within four walls,* and all those whom she accused were *discharged and declared innocent!* The judges, who were eighteen in number, debated on her sentence for several days, and, at the conclusion, there were nine who were strong for her acquittal and nine for her condemnation. Neverthe-

* It was long believed that she escaped by aid of a lover who discovered her place of incarceration, but that the government of Louis XIII. (*i.e.*, of Richelieu) thought it best not to make any further stir in the matter.

less, the above sentence was passed on her! To all this has to be added the fact that, a few years later, a fire broke out in the room where the papers that recorded her statements, as well as her answers to the questions put to her, were stored, and it was freely asserted in Paris that it had been caused by the accomplices in the plot to murder the King, so that all evidence of her story should disappear for ever. Meanwhile, ere this, it was openly stated that not only had the *greffier*, or clerk of the Court, written the statement so illegibly that no person, including himself, could afterwards read it, but also that the judges had all sworn a solemn oath on the New Testament never to repeat a word outside the Court of what the woman had narrated, and that they had burnt a number of copies of the evidence given by her.*

Thus stands the case of Jacqueline le Voyer, styled variously "La Comans" and "l'Escoman," and thus it may be left while we turn to the ultimate result of the testimony of La Garde.

It has been told how he rejected the contemptible offer of Controller of the Beer Tax (a post about equal to that of an inferior Custom-House officer), and that, on the rejection, he was incarcerated in the Bastille; those who had procured him the offer of the post being

* L'Estoile, Germain-Brice, P. Lacombe, and many others.

probably of the opinion that, since he could not be bribed, he had better be prevented from speaking out more plainly. As has been suggested, his story was not wholly true, but it was partly so. If he was wrong in the tag which he attached to what he really knew, he was at least right in the main. He did undoubtedly come into contact with the self-exiled Leaguers in Naples, and was acquainted with their names as well as their intentions: he was the informant of the French Ambassador at Rome and of Zamet; and those in Paris who were in correspondence with the plotters in Naples had the best reason for knowing that such was the case and that there was no invention on the part of La Garde in the particulars. But, even in those days, and especially after Louis XIII. had uttered the remark that he would cause more full inquiries to be made into the manner in which his father had lost his life, it was impossible to imprison a man—who, at the best, was doing a service to the country in exposing the plotters, and, at the worst, was still doing it, though with a view to his own advantage—without inquiring into his statements; without, in fact, trying him. Nevertheless, the trial did not take place until his factum was published, and, as has been shown, the result was that he was awarded a pension for life.

It has been said that the acceptance of this pension nullifies the whole value of his information, but that is not the light in which that acceptance should be regarded. He undoubtedly wanted money, he was worn with the life he had led, but, in endeavouring to obtain a sum which should save him from starvation in his old age, he was only doing what ninety-nine men in a hundred did in those days when they had something to sell or some claim to advance. Moreover, with the power he held in his hand, he could have stipulated for a far larger sum, and would, in all probability, have got it ; or he might have applied to Spain to pay him handsomely to hold his tongue, in which case he would have run no risk whatever of imprisonment. Spain would, it is obvious, have been willing enough to do this, since it would have been most unadvisable for her to perform any act—or be known to perform any act—which would cause Henri to withdraw his encouragement of the Jesuits, or drive him to exert his superior military power against Spain herself. Spain !—whose armies were now composed of peasants, full of martial instincts, it is true, but void of the most elementary rudiments of military science ; Spain—whose coffers, once bulging with wealth, were now almost empty !

CONCLUSION

IN following Ravaillac's words and actions from the time when he committed his murderous deed to the moment when he expiated his crime by a hideous death, we may look forward confidently to proving that, not only was he actually independent of any plot whatever that d'Épernon had set on foot, but also that—notwithstanding the fact of this traitor having undoubtedly arranged a plot to slay the King on this very journey—everything justified the Court of Enquiry, ordered by Parliament, in acquitting d'Épernon and his friends owing to the inexactitudes which appeared in the testimonies of Jacqueline le Voyer and Pierre La Garde. That, however, the Court of Enquiry was glad to do so cannot be doubted. The members of it were, indeed—remembering the power of d'Épernon, the innate wickedness of the Marquise de Verneuil and the bitter tongue of Mdlle. du Tillet—afraid to do aught else. As for the former, it is doubtful if any verdict of guilty could have stood against him, considering his position and influence, the infancy of the new King, and the grateful

regard which Marie must have entertained for the man who had forced Parliament to constitute her Queen Regent without loss of time. As to the stories of any undue intimacy existing between d'Épernon and her, they have already been disposed of and need not be referred to again. Next, with regard to the Marquise de Verneuil, she, too, was safe—in spite of the Queen's loathing for her and the probability that the *vengeance Italienne* of the "Florentine woman," if it existed, had never slumbered—from the fact that, if d'Épernon could not be proceeded against, neither could she. Du Tillet was also safe under his protection, and was, in any case, little more than a go-between of the various plotters.

It has, however, been mentioned that Marie was regarded by many as having had, if not a share in the assassination plot of d'Épernon, at least a shrewd suspicion that such a plot was brewing; and, if Le Voyer's statement that the Queen instantly left Paris on hearing her story and then returned only to leave it again were true, it would point strongly towards the justification of that suspicion. It has been indicated, however, that both the statements of these denouncers—while possessing a solid base of what might have been true, though, as a matter of fact, they might have been gathered after the event—required to be considerably

embellished and draped with an air of veracity, as well as with a number of incidental circumstances, ere they could stand the searching examinations to which their authors would be subjected. But, even had all these embellishments stood the light of such examinations, or had there been no embellishments at all, and only sheer, hard matters of indisputable fact produced, there was still that in the Queen's own conduct which went far to surmount the idea of her being involved in the plot simply because she first left Paris on a visit she had long been engaged to pay, and then, on her return, again left the city to join her husband who was ill at Fontainebleau. Moreover, her desire to prevent Henri from setting out on the visit to Sully is little in accordance with the action of a wife who would know, if she were in the plot, that this was the day arranged for the murder, and that, if she kept the victim at home, she would mar the schemes of the others and herself.

The greatest reason of all has, however, been already touched upon, namely, that the drop from Queen Consort to Queen Regent is one which it is hardly to be supposed any queen would ever desire to make. Her revenues suffer by such a change; her position is enormously depreciated; in all cases another Queen Consort soon, or at once, appears to take her predecessor's original place; gradually, as the son of the Queen

Regent assumes all the power which her late husband possessed, she retires to the position which is the lot of all dowagers. Marie was, therefore, scarcely the woman to take part in the slaying of her husband only to exchange her great position for one such as this, even though she had no affection for him. But that she had affection for him cannot be doubted. Without it she would scarcely have been jealous of the Marquise de Verneuil, she would never have exclaimed that the other had poisoned the whole of her life, and she would, undoubtedly, have laughed at Henri's indecision in setting forth to see Sully instead of imploring him on her knees to remain at home with her.

One thing there is, however, in connection with the evidence given by Jacqueline le Voyer and by La Garde, which appears at first to be inexplicable. This is the difference between the treatment of the two informers ; the second of whom is accorded a pension for life and the first of whom is sent to prison for life. In point of fact, the casual student of the circumstances would be inclined to say that the female witness knew more, and had more to reveal, than the male witness. She had been in the secret of the scheme and in the house of the Marquise de Verneuil, which was often visited by d'Épernon ; in the house of Mdlle. du Tillet,

from which place the letters for the plotters in Spain and for the Spanish possessions were usually despatched. But whatever La Garde knew he had learnt casually, as "an outsider" only, and from sitting at meals in a tavern with a few persons with whom he had formerly had some acquaintance, persons whose information he had improved upon by a good many of those embellishments of which we have spoken.

Nevertheless, it may be said, after due reflection, that he was the most dangerous of the two, for the reason that all which Le Voyer stated could be denied, and naturally would be, by those witnesses on their own behalf, d'Épernon, the Marquise and du Tillet—no matter whether the denials were true or false, while the statements of La Garde could not be denied by any of his dinner companions in Naples. His declaration, as well as that of the woman, was not made until the murder had taken place; those companions would probably be only too willing, as old Leaguers and old Catholics who hated the Huguenots and all Protestants, to acknowledge not only the truth of his assertions, but to glory in them. As for the story about Ravaillac and his crimson and violet dress—to use what was probably as much the expression of a Frenchman in those days as it is to-day—*c'était un détail*, and neither a particularly bad nor a particularly good one.

But that which played a still greater part than aught else in obtaining for La Garde his pension, was the fact that one of the enterprising printer-publishers had obtained a copy of his factum, or one resembling it and written by La Garde himself, and had produced it in print. The edition was, indeed, bought up at once, perhaps by those whose safety it most jeopardized; but new editions are always easily produced. That had to be stopped, and there was only one way in which it could be done. The author obtained his pension, the printer-publisher was no doubt quite amenable to reasoning of a solid nature, and d'Épernon and the ladies of his acquaintance heard no more of the matter.

Turning now to Ravaillac's own statements, given at a time when he had nought to fear since his doom was fixed irrevocably, and when they were also given for the greater part under subjection to one of the most awful tortures to which human beings can be exposed, let us examine his own answers to the interrogatories addressed to him.

In those interrogatories, published by order of the Parliament, Ravaillac is reported to have said that he recognized that the moment for killing the King had come when he saw the carriage stopped by the broken-down wain, and observed his Majesty turn and lean towards d'Épernon to speak to him. Of this answer a

great point has been made, as testifying to the fact that Ravaillac knew d'Épernon, while, as it was not at all probable that such as he would have been likely to know one of the principal subjects in France unless he had been serving him in some special way, it stood to reason that Ravaillac must have been employed by the Duke to commit the murder. We have already discussed the probability of how the most humble inhabitant of a country town is almost certain to know the most important one by sight, if in no other way, and, indeed, the thing is so obvious that it scarcely needed any discussion whatever. The above point stands, therefore, for nothing.

Ravaillac is also, in the printed statements, made to assert that La Force, when refusing him admission to the Louvre, asked him if he was a firm Catholic, and if he knew the Duc d'Épernon; and Ravaillac replied that he knew of him and that he was himself a firm Catholic.

These answers, as printed, would at once seem to decide the argument as to whether Ravaillac was a tool of d'Épernon and concerned in his plot, were it not that, when they were published, those responsible for the publication seem to have forgotten one small incident which they would have done well to remember. If Ravaillac was a tool of d'Épernon, what justification

had the judges for condemning the former to an awful death and acquitting the latter of any complicity in the crime? It is strange that none in those days seems to have noticed this extraordinary piece of inconsistency on the part of the tribunal, and that no writer, so far as is known, remarked upon it.

Later, when the Marquis de la Force had become a Duke, he, like so many other persons of high rank who had been concerned in the tragic scene of the 14th of May, felt an inspiration to write his memoirs. They are not only deeply interesting but also full of matter connected with the period of Henri IV., while, as La Force was a brave soldier, a man of honour and a devoted adherent of the King, they may be relied upon as trustworthy. Now he, too, touches upon the subject of Ravaillac accosting him at the gates of the Louvre, but he tells the story in a manner vastly different from the way it is told in the officially published statement of the murderer, and, indeed, in a manner which was almost undoubtedly the one in which Ravaillac himself narrated it. The question he is represented as asking, with regard to Ravaillac knowing d'Épernon, does not appear, nor, of course, does Ravaillac's supposed reply; while La Force states that he could extract nothing from the man concerning his business or what he wanted, "either by words or menaces."

So much, therefore, for one portion of this remarkable examination—as published! But it is doubly interesting—and puzzling!—as it proceeds, especially when the shadow of doubt begins to be cast upon it; while, as we read the official report, we are almost stupefied with astonishment at noticing the innumerable traps which the arrangers of it are continually setting for their own feet. They state that they threatened the unfortunate wretch with the determination to bring his mother and father to Paris and execute them before his eyes if he would not confess who his employers were: yet, when the Duc d'Épernon and the two women who were accused of being his employers are interrogated, they acquit them. They tell Ravaillac that his answers are false, since, being the son of beggars and himself a beggar, he must have received aid from wealthy employers so as to be able to make his various journeys and to live: yet they know those who are denounced as the wealthy employers, and still they acquit them! Was a more extraordinary hotch-potch of legal proceedings ever conducted in any court of law in the world if the statement of those proceedings is to be relied on? Was ever an accomplice in a crime charged with his guilt, while every effort was made by those who so charged him, and while having their suspicions directed against his employer,

to acquit that employer? And what, indeed, was the utility of the greater part of these interrogations? What was the use of attempting to make the man inculpate d'Épernon and de Verneuil when they knew that nothing was farther from their intentions than to punish either of them?* Ravaillac's guilt was undoubted, he could not deny it, and would not have denied it if he could; he thought, until he stood before the crowd on the Place de la Grève and heard their curses and objurgations hurled at him, that he had done something that was good in the eyes of God and would make his memory sweet to the people for ever.

But still the same irritating, the same puerile examination went on. Ravaillac would tell no lies to inculpate a man and woman of whom he knew nothing, and the judges, who had no intention of ever convicting that man and woman, endeavoured in every way to make him inculpate them—if the published statement is true—which, as a matter of fact, it is not. It is, in solemn truth, only a fabricated document meant to throw dust in the eyes of the public, and a very badly fabricated one at that. Yet it has been believed by historians, and its inaccuracies have passed almost entirely unperceived. Many things, however, are sup-

* L'Estoile says on the subject: "The cowardliness of the judges in discovering (!) the authors and accomplices was so great as to cause pain to all honest men (*gens de bien*)."

pressed in this remarkable production which have found their way to the light through other channels. For instance, Ravaillac stated that, if his opportunity to murder Henri had not come on the 14th of May, it could never have come at all. He had but three *testons* —nearly a shilling—left. He was that night about to abandon Paris for ever, to give up all hope, to resign his ideas and seek his living once more in the only place where he had ever been able to earn enough to put bread into his mouth. And yet he has been accused of being a paid assassin of d'Épernon's! Was there ever wilder improbability? D'Épernon, bloated with ill-gotten wealth and remunerative offices; the Marquise well-off by the aid of her greed and immorality; yet both refraining from giving the frenzied assassin—their supposed tool, whose knife was whetted to take the King's life—enough money to keep him in Paris until the deed was done!

As another striking instance of the stupidity of this document—or of its framers—we may study the answer of Ravaillac to one of the questions put to him on the subject of his-being in the pay of the conspirators. His reply was that those who were paid to do such a deed as he had done would scarcely, in consideration of their desire to earn the pay, come three times to Paris from a far-off province to obtain an interview with the

intended victim, and to give him a solemn warning of what his fate would be if he refused to comply with what was demanded of him.

At last this remarkably constituted Court of Judgment, which, while endeavouring to make Ravaillac prove that he was an instrument of the plotters, was itself endeavouring to prove that the only persons ever accused of having constructed the plot could not possibly have been guilty of doing so—proceeded to further efforts of a different nature. Torture of criminals was still in use, though that use had sunk very considerably from the high level it had attained in earlier days; and it was now resorted to in the case of Ravaillac. It is painful to read in the memoirs of such a man as La Force and of others, of what he, being in command of the application of this torture, was obliged to do. The prisoner's thumbs were forced in between the trigger and the trigger-guard of a musket, and the weapon twisted round in such a manner that, with it, the thumbs were also twisted, and one of them finally reduced to pulp. But Ravaillac remained silent, or spoke only to assert again that he was entirely alone in his work and had neither employer nor accomplice.

The law—that strange law—was now stretched to an extraordinary and unheard-of point. The oldest lawyers in the kingdom themselves avowed that, since the far-off

days of Louis XI., torture had never been administered to any criminals except those who denied their guilt even when they had been pronounced guilty, and then only to those who refused to give up the names of their accomplices or employers. But Ravaillac was far from denying his guilt, as, indeed, it would have been useless to do: he had no accomplices and he was already condemned. Nevertheless, the torture was again applied and again his answer was the same. He had no accomplice and no employer.

Signs were apparent, however, that a very little more of the sufferings he had already endured would be sufficient to prevent effectually any execution whatever from taking place before the eyes of the whole city. The strong, robust fanatic, the man who had frequently walked a distance of two hundred miles while arriving at, and then relinquishing, his determination to kill the King; the religious maniac who, firm in his belief that he was doing God's behest, would starve, beg for alms, and endure untold privations, could, at last, bear little farther torture. He was, therefore, left in peace until the morning of his execution, when a final attempt was made to force a confession from his lips. It was a useless one. The particular torture he then endured was termed "*la question préalable*," because of its closely preceding execution, and, since it was the last that could

ever be administered to the most firm or obstinate criminal, was generally of hideous severity. It has, however, been advanced—and one may earnestly hope that the suggestion is true—that this severity was exercised more with the intention of stupefying the wretched creature than for any other reason, though it is difficult to believe such to have been the case, since, between its administration and the last scene of all, much remained to be done before the execution of Ravaillac. It is certain that his death was more awful than the death of any criminal has almost ever been in latter-day France—if we except that of Damiens, who stabbed Louis XV. with a harmless penknife which scarcely inflicted a wound—yet other criminals who were executed in the ordinary way had also much to undergo ere they were released from their sufferings.

Ravaillac's sufferings on this last occasion were appalling. The horrible torture known as *les brodequins*, which was similar to the old Scotch torture of the "boot," was administered to him in the following manner. A wooden boot was placed on the foot and leg, and into it were hammered wedges of iron growing larger and larger until the miserable sufferer either answered in the manner desired, or was unable to answer anything at all through his having swooned from the agony of his crushed leg.

Ravaillac grew faint under his sufferings and appeared about to die, but neither then, nor when he set out for, first, his penance at Notre Dame and for, afterwards, his shocking death, did he utter any words excepting those by which he again denied firmly the assertion that he had accomplices or employers.

Excepting only for the words that Ravaillac uttered on his way to execution, and on the Place de Grève before the fatal moment arrived, there would be little use in describing the terrible event; one that would have been more suitable to a race of cannibals than to the people of the great Capital which claimed to be, not without considerable reason, the leading city of the world.

In describing it we shall see, however, that Ravaillac remained unshaken in his statement that he and he alone conceived the deed which he perpetrated; we shall recognize how useless it has ever been to doubt that, as he had always spoken truthfully, so, at the last, in his hour of agony, he continued to speak. To him, religion, or what, in his perverted and distraught mind, he believed to be religion, was all that he had in the world; to him, absolution ere he left the world was the only thing that he required to make his parting from existence easy to him. To obtain the latter he swore so solemn an oath, and gained it under so awful a pledge,

that it would have been impossible for him not to believe that, even as his soul went forth to meet its God, he would have damned that soul to all Eternity had he sworn falsely.

Along the awful route he pursued he must have learnt, if he had never known before, how foul a crime he had committed; to his dark and clouded intellect there came at last the knowledge of how the evil act, which he had deemed so good and pure a one, appeared in the eyes of his countrymen. As he left the door of the Conciergerie the howls and yells of a vast mob fell on his ears; he saw the brandishments of weapons in the air; he saw and felt the stones hurled at him; he observed little babes lifted in their mothers' arms to see the wretch who had slain the King. Where they could reach him, he felt women tear his face with their nails; he heard loud-voiced men curse the mother who had borne him and murmur against the God who had breathed the breath of life into him, while, at the same time, he heard those men thank God in that He had provided a hell that should receive him at last.*

Seated in the *tombereau*, or scavenger's cart, between two priests, whose faces were turned away from him in disgust and horror—to the religious fanatic this must have been as bitter as the pangs of death itself!—

* As stated in the *procès-verbal* of Ravaillac's execution.

wrapped in the sheet in which he was to do his penance outside Notre Dame—he went on until, at last, he was outside the great door of that solemn edifice. Here the crowd was even larger and more compact than before: the windows of the houses near and around the Cathedral were packed with more cursing men and shrieking women; here he performed his penance, and, in the phraseology of the day, made his "*amende honorable à Dieu.*" The next step was to the Grève, the place of execution. It was not far, but on the way the unhappy wretch had the opportunity of observing that the Hôtel de Ville was packed with all the princes and members of the aristocracy who were in Paris at the moment, and that, although many of them might not actually share in the popular detestation of the people for the murderer, they at least pretended to do so. Arrived at the Place de Grève, Ravaillac saw the signs of readiness for his execution. There was the cauldron filled with sulphur, resin, wax and oil, and there another filled with molten lead; one was to receive the severed hand which had struck the blow that killed the King, the other the dismembered remains of the man after his body had been torn to pieces by four huge, white horses already standing in the great *place.* One of these horses appeared weary or unwell and, amidst a tremendous roar of approval from the

multitude, a mounted man descended from his animal and led it forth to take the place of the other.

Now Ravaillac understood; at last he recognized what he had done, and how he had erred in believing that his deed could find favour in any eyes. "Had I but thought," he moaned, "that I should see what I now see, a people so devoted to its King, I would never have committed the deed. I thought the public would have thanked me and they provide the horses that are to tear me to pieces!"

He demanded that a *Salve Regina* might be accorded him as he died, and the order was given that it should be chanted by the monks. The people, however, insisted that no such solemn tribute should be paid; Judas, they said, was entitled to none of the solemnities of death.

But, even as his torture commenced, as the hand which struck Henri to the heart was about to be cut off by the executioner and flung into the cauldron of sulphur and oil; as the hot pincers tore his flesh and the molten lead was cast upon it; as the *greffier* standing by exhorted him to give up the names of his accomplices, the man remained firm in his denials. "I have none," he cried. "I—I alone—conceived the deed."

A moment later, recognizing that his death was at

hand, and that, if he did not expire from the agony he had already endured, the horses would put an end to his sufferings, he appealed to the two priests to give him absolution. But the request was instantly refused, the refusal being based on the fact that he would not divulge the names of those whose tool he was. Ravaillac's answer, even in this supreme moment, was again the same.

Once more, however, he who did not fear death, he who was half dead already, cried out for absolution. For, not fearing death, he still dreaded to go before his God unabsolved by a minister of that God; to quit the world without a promise of eternal pardon and peace. "On condition then," Ravaillac cried, "on condition that, if I have lied, the absolution shall be ineffective. On that condition grant it to me."

At last he obtained his wish, yet the words which accompanied the compliance with the wretched man's prayer were awful. On the condition that, if Ravaillac had lied, his soul passed straight to hell, no rest in purgatory being accorded to him, he received the desired pardon. Yet, terrible as were such words, they had no power to affright the murderer. He had no accomplices. He was safe. Eternity no longer held any terrors for him.

A few moments later he was dead. At the third

strain of the horses he expired. A little later still, the executioner had begun to dismember him and was about to cast his remains into the second cauldron, when the vast crowd prevented him from doing so. They each required a portion of the body of the King's assassin, and most of them obtained one. That night many bonfires blazed in and around Paris, and in their midst were consumed pieces of Ravaillac's frame: on barn doors in other places were nailed similar scraps of his body, as hawks and owls and carrion-crows were nailed as a warning to others of their breed.

Is it to be doubted any farther that the man who died like this—the man who had answered the priest's conditions with the words "I accept them"; who had calmly heard that none in France were evermore to bear the name of Ravaillac; that the house where he was born was to be razed to the ground, and that his father and mother were to be exiled from France and executed as he was executed if they ever returned to it—spoke the truth when he averred again and again that he, alone and without accomplices or employers, had conceived and committed the murder?

* * * * * *

Between the time when Ravaillac expiated his crime

and the revelations of Jacqueline le Voyer, namely, a period of eight months, several strange statements began to be whispered in Paris and the larger provincial cities that, in spite of the manner in which they were bandied about, were not referred to in the examination of the Duc d'Épernon and his two female colleagues. This would appear strange to the minds of any persons of our time if they had not, ere this, become acquainted with the strong resolution to suppress many facts which had been arrived at in the Court circle over which Marie de Médici now presided, and if it were not remembered that Ravaillac had gone to his death with his testimony that he was neither a paid assassin nor an accomplice of the illustrious accused unshaken.

When, however, the above whispers became louder and more numerous; when it began to be hinted that, though Ravaillac's crime might have been totally independent of any plot which chanced to have been projected by others who knew nothing of his existence; when the public began to state openly that he had but anticipated the murder which was to have been committed on the same day in the same neighbourhood—namely, on the last day and in the only neighbourhood available, if Henri was to be slain ere he could set out for the campaign against Spain and Austria—it is indeed singular that the Court had no questions to put on the

subject at the time that d'Épernon and his companions were brought before it. Yet it is equally, or more, strange, that, of the fifty historians of whom Moréri spoke as writing the life and death of Henri, not one of them should have known or heard of the coincidence of a double determination to slay him, each of which was distinct from the other. They might well have done so. There was ample matter afloat which could not have been concealed from the ears of either the members of that Court or of the general public.

At Pithiviers, seventy miles from Paris, the Provost was playing at bowls with his friends, when, hearing the clock of a church strike half-past four, he remarked that at this moment Henri IV. was probably dead or badly wounded. At the same time the Archbishop of Embrun, in the South of France, discoursing on public affairs with some brother prelates who were visiting him, observed that it was impossible that evil should not occur soon to Henri, while adding : " Even now, at this hour " (the time was half-past four) " some awful disaster may have happened to his Majesty."

As regards these two people, the Provost was a man of notoriously bad character, and, in spite of the position he held, was strongly suspected of being a thief and housebreaker, and even a highway robber by night—a combination of callings that was, however, scarcely likely

to call for remark in those days of later medieval France. The Archbishop was not a man of much importance, and the same may be said of his see, which was situated in the Upper French Alps, but he happened to be a brother of the King's principal physician and was, thus, in the way of obtaining news of what was going on in Court circles. Of his remark it may be said that it is possible that he was only repeating what his brother had written to him, but it is significant that, if this were the case, the brother should have been in possession of such information.

But the Provost of Pithiviers was intimate with the family of the Marquise de Verneuil—the Balzac d'Entragues—and their Château de Malesherbes was but a short distance from the above town. He, therefore, had probably been confided in as regards coming events, while, considering the reputation he "enjoyed," it is not impossible that he may have been asked to assist in whatever schemes might be afoot. In any case, he was arrested on account of the remark he had made, taken to Paris and thrust into prison to await his trial on the charge of knowing something in connection with the murder of the King; but he escaped from this proceeding by being found strangled in his cell.*

The above are but two of the many remarkable

* L'Estoile and Nicholas Pasquier both relate these incidents.

statements made by various persons, to which may be added another made by a priest of Douai, who, at the time of Henri's assassination, exclaimed: "At this moment the greatest monarch on earth is being slain." Yet Douai is in the north, and these three places are all widely apart.

It is almost an insult to ask any person who has studied all the foregoing facts extracted from the best contemporary French sources, and from French sources alone, to say what they prove. We know that Spain and Austria—one by the same blood of their rulers, and indivisible except by the territories that intervened between them—hated the Protestants and that branch of Protestantism which was termed the Huguenots, and hated also the only two really great rulers who were Protestants by birth, namely, the late Elizabeth of England and Henri. Against each of them innumerable open attacks had frequently been made (including the Armada against Elizabeth and the whole force of The League against Henri), while, in the form of secret attacks, the repetition would be wearisome. But, now, the power of the great house of Charles V. and of Philip II. was sinking rapidly, as was that of the great country ruled over by the Emperor Rudolph, while the fortunes of the house of Bourbon—which was in another hundred years to become the Royal Family of Spain and

to continue so, with trifling intermissions, until this present day—had already risen. Henri had, since Elizabeth's death, become the most powerful monarch in the world of that period; he was able to crush all and every nation on the Continent which dared to contend against him; even the Pope, supported as he might be by his faithful children, could easily be coerced into doing all that Henri should demand of him. Was it possible, therefore, that Philip III., weak, indolent, and almost beggared by his expulsion from Spain of the Moors, who were his best and richest subjects, both as traders and landowners, should not have hated Henri and all of Henri's following?

We have seen that Naples, one of Spain's brightest European possessions, was a nest wherein treason might be freely hatched; the Netherlands, which Philip's great general, Spinola, had crushed beneath his feet, was another; so, too, was Lorraine and so Franche-Comté. And, poor as Spain might be at this time in comparison with what she had been when possessed of the wealth which Pizarro had poured into her lap from Peru and Cortes from Mexico, she was still able to pay handsomely for services to her; for services freely rendered in return for her gold by embittered and greedy men like d'Épernon, and by jealous, envenomed women like Henriette, Marquise de Verneuil.

But if anyone can still doubt that in Spain, in Naples, in Brussels, in the great superb mansions of the ancient nobility of The League ; in the houses of Henriette and of Mdlle. du Tillet—the one a faded, neglected mistress, the other a woman who, though not yet cast off by d'Épernon, was still bitter and disappointed that she had not been selected to fill the same laudable position to a higher than he, namely, his master—in the garrets of Paris and in the cellars beneath the houses of Paris, were sheltering either plotters or *assassins à gages* ready to murder the King—there are further proofs that must be considered almost indisputable. Before the death of Henri there were portraits of Louis XIII. prepared in which he was described beneath them as *Roi de France ;* portraits that were not hasty daubs, but copperplate engravings which could not have been made ready the moment after Henri was dead and sold three days after that, as was the case since L'Estoile bought one in the streets. It is, however, true that some who chanced to hear Ravaillac's frenzied pronouncements to kill the King, might have been induced to prepare such things with a view to obtaining a ready and profitable sale for them ; yet it is to be remembered that his miserable appearance, and his wandering words and wild looks, would have been far more likely to deter them from believing in him than to induce them to go to the

THE DAUPHIN (Louis XIII.).

[*Facing p.* 335

expense of engraving the portrait of a boy who might not come to the throne for another twenty years, if ever, and who, if he did so, would then be a boy no longer, whereby the portrait would have become almost valueless.

It is time to conclude, to sum up the case between those interested in a great historical drama, a romance of real fact, who still believe that Ravaillac was an assassin paid by d'Épernon to do his, and Spain's, foul work, and those who, after deep consideration and much inquiry, believe, as it has been endeavoured to show, that, although there was a plot, Ravaillac had nothing to do with it. His name has been handed down to posterity as one of the most vile assassins who ever polluted the earth; yet, murderer though he was, he was, still, not that. In solemn truth, he was a poor visionary, a creature with terribly sickly tendencies towards, or, perhaps, emanating from, religious hysteria —a form of cerebral weakness more common to the female than to the male sex. Yet, combined with all this, he possessed manly virility and the power of strong endurance, as testified by the manner in which he supported poverty and misery, and by the determination with which he made his journeys to and from Paris over roads unworthy of the name, and in weather that sometimes chilled him to the bone and sometimes almost

broiled him. But he was no paid assassin and no plotter. To him, distracted though he was, d'Épernon would have appeared beneath contempt. He would have spurned an offer of payment for the deed he voluntarily performed as a pious and holy one, as he would have spurned d'Épernon had he approached him, and had he known that the traitor was in the pay of Spain and was rewarded by either promises of wealth or Spanish honours; and as he would have spurned the Marquise de Verneuil as a foul wanton who sold her caresses for money and then plotted to murder the man who paid the price for them.

One thing has, however, to be said, which may appear extraordinary to many, as, in truth, it is. The Church, the old, established Church, which was the bitter enemy of Henri, had no hand in Ravaillac's terrible resolution. When he wished to become an active member of it—a priest—they refused to admit him and drove him forth with contumely as a man unsuited to be one of its ministers. It may be, indeed, that they doubted if the half-crazed suppliant who saw visions and dreamed dreams, and did not fail to announce that he did so, was fitted to be a member of a community in which silence, self-control and caution are three of its most important requirements; or if, when all the land was in a turmoil between their own faith and the growing

strength of the Protestants, headed by the King, he would not be more of a curse to them than a blessing. But, whether this was so or not, the Church refused to accept him and, when his shocking deed was perpetrated, it was also free of any participation in it. Alone, friendless, starving and roofless, Ravaillac did that which he believed the Almighty had sent him on this earth to do ; alone he did it without patron or associate, and alone he expiated his crime without any single person in all France being found who could be charged with him.

But as concerns the plot which undoubtedly existed, can there be any doubt as to who was at the head of it ? Who but d'Épernon ordered the mysterious ruffians who suddenly appeared on the scene to refrain from touching Ravaillac, and to retire at once ; who exposed the murderer publicly to view at the Hôtel Retz, and, afterwards, in his own family house, with the object of his being questioned as to his accomplices and of his being given the opportunity to reiterate again and again that he had none—but d'Épernon ? Who but d'Épernon, after ordering those unknown, would-be assassins—though not unknown to him !—to retire instantly, made himself master of the situation, directed that the blinds of the carriage should be let down and the body of the King be transported to the Louvre, and then, springing on a

horse, rode off to give the order for the city gates to be closed, and for the Hôtel de Ville to be occupied by soldiers; forbade communications to be permitted between the north and south banks of the Seine, and placed troops in every quarter of the city? And who, after d'Épernon, was the person most embittered against Henri but the mistress who had once possessed a promise of marriage from him which had never been redeemed; the mistress who had been forced to stand aside and see a lawful wife arrive to take the place she had once believed would be hers; the mistress who had also seen Henri's furious passions so re-awakened that both she and that wife were to be swept aside together to make way for the gratification of the new love for a young and high-born princess of sixteen?

In almost every argument, every thesis, every dispute when fairly conducted, there is much reason on either side, though one side must finally preponderate over the other. Those, however, of our way of thinking believe that, in this matter, their side does preponderate. Facts tend more to prove the argument against Ravaillac being even known to the plotters than to prove the argument that he was known to them; and no fact is stronger than that of his own denial combined with his madness, and, perhaps, above all, that of his poverty. On the other hand, nothing was more likely than that,

since there was undoubtedly a plot—or many plots—to slay Henri, those who could not help but know of the last one, as most in Paris knew of it, as Henri himself knew of it or similar plots, should have associated the name of the actual murderer with the names of those who were, and always have been, accused of laying that plot. Here, therefore, is the origin of the error, an origin that owes the greater part of its existence to one of the most dramatic coincidences that has ever arisen in real life. Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas *père*, even their clever predecessor, Pixérécourt, never devised a more dramatic *dénouement* than that a gang of hired murderers should wait to slay a king at one end of a street, while, at the other end, the one by which the victim would enter that street, was a solitary man who not only performed the deed before them, but, in doing so, did their work and saved them and their employers from the crime and from, possibly, the punishment of that crime.

For the crime was in the hearts and minds of employers and *employés;* the intention and the resolute determination of another who regarded himself, not as a murderer, but as an executioner of God's wrath, alone anticipated their foul designs. Chance, that marvellous factor in all human existences, spared d'Épernon and his companions the commission of one more sin in their

wicked lives. Ravaillac, the religious and visionary enthusiast, had done for them that which nothing else would have prevented them from doing for themselves—that which they had made all preparations for doing a few moments later, at the same hour, on the same day, in the same street—in gratification of their hate and spite and greed.

Deeply steeped as their souls were in evil, they were at least saved from one farther blot by the act of a maniac who, shocking as his deed was, had, in all other respects, lived a blameless life; a fanatic who went to his dreadful end free of any other crime than that deed to be charged against him at the Great Account.

THE END

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